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AND JESUS SAID...

The Master's answers to human needs

Hoover Rupert



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AND JESUS SAID . . .

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To The Congregation Of

F I R S T M E T H O D I S T C H U R C H

Ann Arbor, Michigan

In gratitude for nine years of stimulating Christian fellowship, which continues to bring inspiration and joy to one who has learned much of him from them

PREFACE

How many times do we find ourselves saying of a person no longer available for conversation, "If only I could talk with him . . . !" How quickly misunderstandings can be cleared up, how easily statements can be understood when we are in the physical presence of the other person involved. And how contrastingly difficult it is sometimes to "read between the lines" correctly when a letter comes, or to try to picture the expression on the other fellow's face at the far end of the telephone wire.

What Christian has not at times tried to picture what it must have been like to be in the presence of Jesus during the days of his earthly ministry? Who has not longed for a chance to catch the sound of his voice or to edge into a group who were conversing with the Master?

Fortunately, we have in the Gospels the records of many of the conversations of our Lord. They offer us clear insights into his teaching, flashing pictures of his personality in momentary fellowship with persons of all kinds. And strangely enough we come away from sharing in these conversations with the feeling that Jesus' words are uniquely applicable to our own life situation.

These chapters are based on selected conversations of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels and the Acts. They offer a conversational panorama from the boyhood of Jesus through his ministry to various individuals and groups of persons up to and including his final Great Commission. This is no scholarly attempt to add further to biblical exegesis, though

AND JESUS SAID . . .

effort has been made to take advantage of the contributions of biblical scholars. In each reported conversation this writer seeks to point up the details of the persons and scenes involved and to make application of Jesus' words to modern living.

Prepared first as a sermon series, some of the chapters were later used as the basis for series of platform addresses at Methodist adult assemblies at Crystal Springs, Michigan and Epworth Forest, Indiana. They now have been written again with the reader particularly in mind. Some of the flavor of the spoken word is bound to emerge in places—for good or for bad.

My list of creditors is long when I recall all who have directed my study and my thought. Effort has been made to acknowledge the source of all quoted material. But there are college and seminary professors who first introduced me to the disciplines of Bible study, particularly the late Dr. William Jackson Lowstuter of Boston University to whom at least twelve generations of theologians are indebted for his inspired New Testament teaching. There are ministers of all denominations whose sermons and lectures across the years have helped shaped my thinking. This is not to mention the loyal members of parishes in Kansas, Massachusetts, and Michigan whose encouragement and personal faith have played no small part in my own personal religious experience. To all these I acknowledge my gratitude.

I am particularly grateful for permission to use the translations of J. B. Phillips at the beginning of each chapter, from his readable and widely used *The New Testament in Modern English*, which very often is read from my pulpit.

HOOVER RUPERT

CONTENTS

AND JESUS SAID . . .

1. To His Parents—ABOUT GOD	11
2. To Nicodemus—ABOUT THE FACTS OF LIFE.	22
3. To the Samaritan Woman —ABOUT LIFE'S SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITIES	32
4. To Zaccheus—ABOUT COMPARATIVE VALUES.	44
5. To the Chief Priests—ABOUT AUTHORITY	55
6. To Simon Peter —ABOUT THE CENTRAL FACT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH	66
7. To Bartimaeus and Legion —ABOUT THE HEALING POWER OF FAITH	76
8. To the Rich Young Ruler—ABOUT LIFE'S DECISIVE CHOICE . . .	89
9. To Pilate—ABOUT ROYALTY AND TRUTH	100
10. To Mary Magdalene—ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS OF EASTER	111
11. On the Emmaus Road —ABOUT THE MIRACLE OF RESURRECTION	122
12. To His Disciples —ABOUT THE CONTINUING CALL OF THE LIVING LORD	133

To His Parents —
ABOUT GOD

1

Every year at the Passover Festival, Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem. When he was twelve years old they went up to the City as usual for the Festival. When it was over they started back home; but, without Joseph and his mother knowing it, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. They went a day's journey assuming that he was somewhere in their company, and then they began to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. They failed to find him, however, and turned back to the City, looking for him as they went. Three days later, they found him—in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All those who heard him were astonished at his powers of comprehension and at the answers that he gave. And when Joseph and Mary saw him, they could hardly believe their eyes, and his mother said to him, "Why have you treated us like this, my son? Here have your father and I been very worried, looking for you everywhere!"

And Jesus replied,

"But why did you look for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's House?"

But they did not understand this reply. Then he went home with them to Nazareth and obeyed them. And his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And as Jesus grew up in body and mind, he grew also in the love of God and of those who knew him.

(Luke 2:41-52)

A BOY, HIS PARENTS, AND GOD

It is a difficult thing to write a biography of a man who lived in obscurity for twenty-eight or more years of his short life. We have the information from four fragmentary pamphlets compiled and written by friends and followers at a time some years after his departure from the scene. Only two of them tell of his birth. Only one of them tells of this boyhood incident. We have only this one recorded conversation of Jesus with which to fill in the details of his childhood and adolescence. Otherwise, the years are hidden from our view.

Can we then hope to discover what kind of boy Jesus was? Certainly we can know something about the Galilee of the first century, the kind of world in which Jesus grew up. We actually have few details of the childhood of William Shakespeare, for instance, yet we can reconstruct his youth based on the life of a youth in Elizabethan England. So we can examine the influences at play on the life of a young boy in Nazareth of Galilee during the Roman occupation. We can seek to find out what in general would a boy in that first century have seen and been influenced by to make religion a ruling passion in his life, as drama was the ruling passion in the life of Shakespeare.

One finds many insights into the childhood of Jesus when he examines his words and teachings for passages and references that throw light on these silent years. Moreover, we can observe the well-known characteristics belonging to the mature Jesus and reasonably conjecture that they may already have been present in his first years. Psychology constantly reminds us of the influences of childhood experiences on the maturity or immaturity in the personality pattern of adults.

So we look at this scene in the Jerusalem Temple when a twelve-year-old boy is found by his searching parents, talking with the religious leaders of his faith and asking the kind of questions which marked him as possessed of rare spiritual insight for a boy of his age. Jesus' presence in the Temple was no sudden occurrence, unrelated to

the rest of his life. Behind this scene and throwing light on this conversation which Jesus had with his parents, one sees the family religion and parental faith of Joseph and Mary, and the creative partnership of home and church in the religious nurture of children and youth.

FAMILY RELIGION

A few years ago a recalled reservist, his wife, and three children were living in a hotel near the military base to which he was temporarily assigned. A guest noticed the soldier's little daughter "playing house" in the lobby. "Isn't it too bad," she said solicitously, "that you don't have a home?" "Oh, we have a home," the child answered. "We just don't have a house to put it in." The child had insight she knew not of! It takes more than a house to make a home. And it takes more than a general religious feeling on the part of the society of which one is a part to create a religious environment that produces family religion.

One can understand the conversation of the boy Jesus with his parents in the Jerusalem Temple and the subsequent return to their Nazareth home only as he sees it in the light of a family religious faith which had created a religious environment in the home of Joseph and Mary. Jesus could ask the intelligent questions—and more important, understand the answers of the priests, because he had been nurtured in a home where religious truth and practices were the natural and normal part of the daily family experience. In his home religion was a part of every phase of family life. God and their belief in him dominated all practices. One did not even enter the house without placing his fingers tenderly on the doorpost reminder of God and offering a brief prayer as he passed the threshold. All of life was holy, and belief in God was the basic family belief.

We can know that Jesus early learned about God and the religious faith of the Hebrews because his father Joseph was also the religious

leader or priest of the household. He represented the family in the Nazareth synagogue and congregation. He offered prayers at every meal and at morning and evening worship in the family. It was not strange that Jesus should feel at home in a Temple which he was visiting for the first time. Joseph had doubtless described to his eager son this beautiful shrine and center of Judaism. And the religious practices had all been explained over and over again in the various feast day ceremonies which Joseph had conducted in the carpenter's home.

One wonders what we have done in our culture to preserve this important parental care in the religious nurture of children! What if Joseph and Mary had neglected their parental obligations for the religious training of their children—the way more than fifty per cent of American parents are doing at this very moment? If you have come from a home where family religion was a recognized part of the home experience, you can praise God, as I can, for parents who accepted as part of their sacred parental obligation the religious nurture of the children in their home. Do you recall the words of Thomas Carlyle who described his mother's praying as the strongest spiritual influence of his life? He wrote:

The highest whom I knew on earth, I here saw bowed down, with awe unspeakable, before a Higher in heaven: such things, especially in infancy, reach inwards to the very core of your being.

Or, listen to a similar testimony from Ray Stannard Baker who said of his father's prayers,

Those prayers made a powerful impression on me, though I doubted that my father was dust even when he told God so. I thought how really tremendous and wonderful God must be when my father was willing to bow before him. When I thought how much father admired God, I had a high opinion of him.

Hearing such testimony and knowing what the influence of his parents' religious practices had on the young Jesus, dare one ask himself the question, "How long since my child heard me pray?" Or, "Will my child be helped or hindered in knowing God because of my religious or irreligious influence on his life?"

But then perhaps you raise the question, "Why didn't Joseph and Mary go to the Temple first in looking for Jesus?" Do you know that they didn't? Remember, they were a day's journey out when they finally determined that Jesus was not with the caravan. That meant walking that second day back to the city. It was the third day they found the boy. Their task was not as simple as yours might be if you went to your church looking for your child—even finding a youngster there might prove time-consuming. Consider the immense size of the Jerusalem temple and its surrounding courts and buildings. At this feast day estimates are that as many as a million pilgrims thronged the city to worship and sacrifice. The temple could accommodate more than 200,000 people in its sprawling facilities. Now put yourself in the place of these harried parents who can't imagine what has happened to their son on his first visit to the big city. There was no first-aid station or public address system to issue a message about the lost boy—or as that modern cartoon youngster said to his finders, "Has anybody turned in a lost mother?" I have no doubt that Joseph and Mary hurried straight to the temple and systematically started searching among the throngs of people. Is it not a natural parental word that is recorded here, "Why have you treated us like this, my son? Your father and I have been very worried about you, looking for you everywhere!"

They found him in the temple because their example of family religion had resulted in a highly sensitized interest in things religious. We need to remind ourselves here that religion is a product primarily of environment rather than inheritance. One is not merely religious because he has inherited an interest along with his biological heritage.

He is religious as he comes to see the importance of religious practice in the life of his family or his community. One's religious tendencies are neither developed or stifled by his environment.

Many years ago Maxwell Anderson protested what is happening in the environments of many of our large cities. His play, *Dead End*, told of life on city streets where potential delinquents played. As the drama unfolded one saw how the environment of the dead-end street slaps down the child who would free himself from the life of crime, which seemed to be the street's only consistent form of work and play.

How many people, who are otherwise providing for their children, are raising them on a spiritual dead-end street? Children there have no chance at the spiritual values of life, as far as the family is concerned, because there is no religious environment. Can we hope to have a morally healthy and wholesome environment for our younger generation unless there is truly an adequate religious undergirding?

Parents are cheating their children when they fail to provide today's counterpart of a religiously oriented home similar to the humble home of Joseph and Mary in ancient Nazareth. I shall not soon forget the words of a noted judge in a southern city whose work with delinquents was nationally known. I visited her court when she was hearing the case of a twelve-year-old boy who was charged with vandalism. In talking to the parents, she asked if the boy went to Sunday school. "Well, he hasn't for several years," was the reply. The mother gave as the excuse, "Well, Judge, we're building a house out from the city and my husband works so much all week that Sundays we have to go out to work on the house." Here is the memorable reply of this friend of children: "Hmph, it seems to me you've been so busy *building a house* you haven't had time to *make a home* for this boy. That's why he's in trouble."

Well, the distraught parents who were searching frantically for their boy Jesus, lost somewhere in the city of Jerusalem, spent their lives making a home for their son where religion was part and parcel of

the daily diet. It must have paid off positively. The account ends with the words, "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. . . . And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." Family religion can make the difference in what happens to twelve-year-old boys!

PARENTAL FAITH

Jesus' response to his parents' words is an indirect compliment to their religious teaching. With respectful surprise he inquires why they should be surprised to find him here when, "You have taught me that I should be in my Father's house." Parental faith is the basis of good practice in family religion, and the young Jesus had inherited much from his parents' faith. He was still in the process of fashioning his own faith—thus the quest in the temple.

One question always emerges here: If God's Son was so dependent on the religious faith of his parents—as his later life and teachings give abundant evidence—how much more do our children look to our religious faith and practice for example and influence? Take one facet of Jesus' religious faith—his belief in God as Father. Where do you think Jesus could get the insights into how a father loves his children if not from his father Joseph? Was not Jesus' concept of God as Father enriched because Joseph was such a loving father to the boy? Could Jesus have pictured our heavenly Father in such a way, if he had not known the patience, forgiveness, and loving concern of an earthly father?

A minister who went one time to preach for a service in a boy's reformatory was cautioned by the host chaplain to avoid reference to God's Fatherhood being like the relationship of these boys with their fathers. "Because," said he, "many of these boys are here because of their father's failure to be a loving father." How well do you love your children? Can they gain a good and wholesome idea of God's love because they know what love is through your love for them?

How fortunate for the boy Jesus to find in Joseph and Mary a parental faith so vital that it developed strong religious convictions in their children! We take on our parental attitudes and actions, don't we? How much we imitate our elders, when we are young! Our parents' politics and prejudices, religious practices and social graces—these we tend to accept and continue, at least through our early years.

Among the convictions that developed in Jesus because of his parental influence, one can see his affirmation of life as an *affirmation of God's sovereignty*. God was not God just on the Sabbath but through all the days. He did not operate simply in the temple at Jerusalem but in the home, at the school, in the carpenter shop, in the social occasions in the village. All of life was under his sovereign control.

Moreover, Jesus learned from his parents that *spiritual values are supreme*. He never rose above the peasant level of living in terms of food and housing. His parents could offer him little of material wealth. He never knew what free citizenship means in a political sense—always there was the shadow of Roman occupancy of his land. But Jesus soon learned that life becomes vital and dynamic according to its acceptance and possession of spiritual values.

A third conviction of his parents' religion was that *religious habits are important*. There was no question as to the regularity in prayer and worship in the home and at the Nazareth house of worship. Jesus was not thought to be so devoid of religious feeling in his youth that he was encouraged to "look around" at religious practices and then make up his own mind. What misguided, inconsistent practices we now have among parents who wish to provide opportunity for their child to make his own decision! Jesus made his own decisions in matters of religion. But he had a firm foundation for decision in the regularity of the religious habits of his family. Generally, the folks who support the idea of letting the child wait until he is grown to decide for himself about religious affiliation are folks who themselves have no vital affiliation with organized religion and therefore, are

actually incompetent to know and advise in the area of religious faith and practice.

Inspiration is found in this account of Jesus' boyhood in the fact that a human boy was in search of the divine Presence because *his parental faith had established in his mind and heart the fact of God's existence*. His parents were naturally relieved to find the boy safe and alive. And their vexation at his treatment of them is equally natural for parents. But no wonder Mary pondered these things in her heart later as she recalled the glowing words of the religious leaders who, I am certain, said to the Nazareth parents, "That's a fine boy you have there, keen mind, sensitive spirit. He'll be a leader one day!" Could not there have been some suggestions, too, about how they might help the young man make the most of his rare spiritual insight and deep religious concern?

What a responsibility for us who are parents to create the kind of environment in which the religious phases of our children's personalities will have full opportunity to grow in their God-given process of maturity! To be co-laborers with God in Christian nurture—this is our common task as parents.

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP

This conversational experience of Jesus points up that there were things the young Nazarene wanted to know which lay beyond the ability of his parents or the village leaders to answer. What parent doesn't know the frustration of having his youngster ask questions for which he has no adequate answer. For many this comes in the field of religion and theology. But for some it comes simply in the field of school homework. The arithmetic problems are the ones that baffle me. And sometimes the teacher doesn't appreciate my help—it's more of a hindrance to my daughter's progress in her pursuit of math—or its pursuit of her! But you know the baffling questions that come in the realm of religion, as children ask about every phase of life and death

that happens to occur to them. Who has not scrambled for words in the effort to explain what death means, or where God came from in the first place, or why Jesus was killed, or why there are so many different churches, or what God looks like, when a thoughtful and serious youngster asks a question?

Well, if it's any comfort to you, think what a time Joseph and Mary must have had as Jesus grew older and more able to ask questions they could not answer. I dare say, the things Jesus learned in his two and a half days in the Jerusalem temple brought a real sense of relief to his parents, as he recounted to them the answers which they had wished they could give but just didn't know.

This clearly points up with positive insight the creative partnership which needs to exist between church and home in the religious nurture of the child. Certainly, the home cannot do it alone. But neither can the church do it alone. Yet how many parents operate on the erroneous assumption that they need only throw the child to the mercies of the church, and somehow he will emerge with religious maturity in the day of his need?

Religious education's biggest problem is not only to be found in the minimal time which is available for Christian education in the church but in the failure of parents to cooperate with the church in its efforts to help their child. What I say here could be equally well said by our public school authorities concerning the general education of the child. How often parents are almost totally neglectful of their part in this educational task—until the child comes home with marks less than they think he should have as their child, or until some overt expression of need brings them running to the school in complaint or in search of help! Can you believe that there are parents who look on the church as the sole agency for the training of children in religious growth? They sense no link between what they do and what we seek to do in the church. They regard their obligation as getting the child to the

church building on schedule and picking him up at the end of the session.

How many times a pastor sees it in the parent who pulls up in front of the church door, lets the child out of the car, and gives him his weekly shove toward God, while he goes back home to bed or to breakfast or to the Sunday paper, until such time as he makes "the supreme effort" to come back down after his youngster!

What needs to be seen by all who are parents is the joint responsibility for religious nurture. The church has its obligation and none of us seeks to shirk it. But our greatest threat may well be not outer space missiles or communism, but the indifference of parents to the need for character growth and training in this creative partnership between church and home.

So one finds in this brief exchange of words by Jesus and his parents some rich insights into the importance of parental faith and family religion. I believe the key to our understanding of this creative partnership is found in the link between the obedience of Jesus to his parents in Nazareth and the maturing process which took place during those hidden years of childhood and adolescence. The record is clear that he grew not only in physical stature, but in intellectual growth and in the securing of the spiritual values of his religion into the very structure of his personality.

If it happened there to Jesus, could it not be that it might happen here to us and ours? If so the record can read, "Helped by the parental faith and family religion he found in his home, this child increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

To Nicodemus —

ABOUT THE FACTS OF LIFE

2

¶ One night Nicodemus, a leading Jew and a Pharisee, came to see Jesus.

"Master," he began, "we realize that you are a teacher who has come from God. Obviously no one could show the Signs that you show unless God were with him."

"Believe Me," returned Jesus, "a man cannot even see the Kingdom of God without being born over again."

"And how can a man who's getting old possibly be born?" replied Nicodemus. "How can he go back into his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

"I assure you," said Jesus, "that unless a man is born from water and from spirit he cannot get into the Kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and spirit gives birth to spirit: you must not be surprised that I told you that men must be born again. . . ."

For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost, but should have eternal life. You must understand that God has not sent His Son into the world to pass sentence upon it, but to save it—through Him. Any man who believes in Him is not judged at all. It is the one who will not believe who stands already condemned, because he will not believe in the character of God's only Son. This *is* the judgment—that light has entered the world and men have preferred darkness to light because their deeds are evil. Anybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from

it, for fear his deeds may be exposed. But anybody who is living by the truth will come to the light to make it perfectly plain that all he has done has been done through God."

(John 3:1-8, 16-21)

THE FACTS OF LIFE

We belong to a generation that prides itself on possessing the facts of life. And there is much to be said for the widespread enlightenment that has come in the western world through universal education and mass communication. However, as David Roberts reminded us, we are also an age which very often detaches physical and spiritual birth from God.¹ For such a mind life is not the divine gift of God as religion teaches but the mere result of a continuous biological process which goes on from generation to generation. And moreover, any transformation that may take place in a life is accounted for through psychological and social adjustments on the part of individuals and groups.

In the context of such thinking the conversation of Jesus and the learned Nicodemus takes on a new meaning and imparts a new message. For Jesus was talking about the spiritual facts of life to one who assumed he had known the answers and now was confused by Jesus' discussion. Jesus was giving here the Christian slant on the basic facts of life. And many persons, including Nicodemus, are unprepared to see life from the Christian point of view.

We look at this conversation of Jesus to learn what is said, what is meant, and what it has specifically to say to us twenty centuries later.

WHAT IS SAID HERE?

Nicodemus came to Jesus somewhat furtively. It was nighttime. He was a man of considerable position and influence among the Pharisees.

¹ Roberts, *The Grandeur and Misery of Man* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 3.

He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Hebrew faith in Jerusalem. Apparently he was not anxious that his colleagues should know of his visit to this teacher, whose message and miracles were arousing the people so that the Pharisees were taking steps to stop him. Nicodemus wanted to get from Jesus a further sign that he was a unique teacher. He had seen evidence in the miracles that Jesus was no fly-by-night evangelist. He had heard enough of his teaching to have his active mind challenged to inquire further. So now he comes to Jesus to learn more about what his teachings had to say. And Jesus confuses him with the simple demand for spiritual rebirth. He is saying that if the new life which God can bring into the human heart is to be lived, there must be a new creature, wholly new—as if born anew. In fact he states it simply in the Scripture, “unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Before you laugh at Nicodemus and his childish question about going once again through the process of physical birth, realize that he was stunned by Jesus’ words. Jesus was saying that one must, in his spiritual life, experience the kind of rebirth that goes on in the physical world, when new life comes into being. And Nicodemus was probably not being as literal as the gospel makes him sound. A. J. Gossip suggests, “What stumbled Nicodemus was not so much the theory of the need of a new birth as its impracticability.”² He apparently was a man along in years. How could an old man be made young? What transformation could come in the life of a man whose habits had been grooved into ruts of routine and whose weaknesses had become a part of the woven pattern of life’s garment? Can you teach an old human dog new spiritual tricks? And after all here was a religious leader of the people whose piety was widely known and universally accepted under the Hebrew law and practice. Did he need this new birth? How can you turn aside from a life of religious leadership to be born anew

² *Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952), VIII, 506.

to an experience which now seems essential, if one is to enter the select group of God's kingdom citizenry?

In reply to these seemingly naïve questions, Jesus had three things to say to Nicodemus. First, he was saying, *status is not enough for salvation*. There is implied the idea that Nicodemus was raising an academic question, that he felt his salvation was assured because of his position in the religious organization. According to Hebrew practice in that day, one adhered to the religious laws and thereby qualified for salvation. Here was a ruler, a Pharisee who doubtless was a meticulous keeper of the law. But Jesus was saying his relationship by blood-kinship to Abraham and his fidelity to the law was not enough. He must share the experience demanded of all persons who entered the kingdom of God. He must be born anew of the "water and the spirit." This could very well be a reference to the practice of baptism which John the Baptist had begun. It was to symbolize the new birth, the conversion, the transforming of life's pattern. And it marked the responsible acceptance of a Spirit-filled life by the convert who indicated his willingness to seek God's will as his pattern for life. Status was not enough for this.

A second thing Jesus was saying here to Nicodemus was that *spiritual rebirth is necessary for everyone*. The hallmark of the Christian in God's kingdom is the spiritual rebirth which comes through God's Son. Thus, for example, Jesus' former leader, John the Baptist, had demanded acceptance of baptism as a sign of this rebirth. Imagine saying to a pious Pharisee that if he wanted to share in the rewards of the faithful in God's kingdom, he must submit to baptism as a symbol of his humble acceptance of the need for spiritual rebirth! None can enter the kingdom of God without this process of spiritually being born anew, said Jesus.

Third, he said, *God can do this for anyone*. Note that this is a God-instigated process. It is not something that man does. Here is no celestial bank in which one stores up treasures through keeping the com-

mandments faithfully or doing the Law's demands with careful adherence to its letter. Jesus is talking about God's free gift of salvation. Here is the grace of God which offers to anyone in any age the gift of life eternal. This is the redeeming grace which alone can assure man of membership in God's kingdom. It is not to be offered to a select group or denied to another as the leaders of the chosen people of Israel had long believed. The gift of God is available for anyone who qualifies for entrance into the kingdom through a spiritual rebirth into the faith, as Christ reveals it. "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," was what Jesus said here.

Jesus is talking about the miraculous power of God's grace to transform the human personality and enable one to master even his own prejudice and vindictiveness. Here is a father who tells of standing at the station during World War II and saying good-by to his son. Like every parent caught in that situation of seeing a son off to war, there were many things he wanted to say but couldn't seem to find the words. He was haunted by the awful fear that his son wouldn't come back. He could think only, "He's going away, and I may not see him again. If he's killed, I hope every Jap will die." Then he says he stopped and said to himself, "What am I saying? I can't even think that and be Christian." But after the train left, he drove out into the country to think. But the only thought that kept running through his mind was the desire for every Japanese to die if his boy died. He prayed for forgiveness. He fought against the thought. Finally, through God's power he mastered it. A year later the ominous telegram came which announced his fears had been well-founded—his son had been killed in a South Pacific battle. What did that father do? Here is what he said, "I had faced it. We are taking his insurance money, and we're putting it into missions for Japan. For what Japan needs and what we need is not more punishment but the redeeming love of God."

What else can transform the vindictiveness of one who has lost one

dear to him in such fashion? God's grace and his love can transform hatred into forgiveness and vindictiveness into genuine good will.

And there isn't an adult person who couldn't tell a similar story of an acquaintance or relative whose life has been changed, whose direction has been reversed, whose weakness has been made strong, whose sins have been forgiven in the spiritual rebirth of personality through the miraculous power of God as revealed in Christ.

Again, Jesus is teaching *the simplicity and childlikeness of the Christian faith*. Nicodemus was a man trained in the rabbinical tradition. He knew the law and the prophets. He was a literate man in an age which saw very few achieve this status. In contrast to his achievements in this regard Jesus is saying that only when one becomes in spirit like a child can he hope to enter the fellowship of the faithful in God's kingdom. Redemption depends on the generous grace of God and the simple faith of man. So many people then and now miss the main point in the Christian faith because they expect some ponderous, profound, other-worldly experience which defies explanation except in terms of higher forms of theological interpretation. When a minister in his preaching gets beyond the depth of the typical member of his congregation, he has lost his chance to interpret the religion of Jesus. Jesus was always talking in terms and phrases, parables and stories that even the most simple-minded person could understand. And he points out that it is this simplicity of faith, this childlikeness of spirit which affords entrance to God's realm.

Then, too, Jesus here is *summoning men to spiritual rebirth in the Christian pattern*. He was aware that the learning of Nicodemus could enable him to understand many things about the religious life that others could not discern. But he put it squarely up to him that he too must share spiritual rebirth if he would enter the sacred precincts of the kingdom of God. Belief in God's gift of life in Christ by accepting Christ as God's revelation is required for all who aspire to be acceptable unto God. Such belief and such acceptance of Christ calls us to be

AND JESUS SAID . . .

conscious of our spiritual nature and to begin living in harmonious sonship with God.

Human nature does not find its complete realization and fulfillment in one's intellectual attainments, although Jesus placed no premium on ignorance. It does not come about because of one's racial or national inheritance, though Jesus never renounced either of these in his case. It does not come through good works, although Jesus constantly emphasized the importance of putting into practical daily use the ideals and principles of the Christian faith. Human nature does find its fulfillment in its conscious union with God. This can come about only as through Christ we undergo spiritual rebirth and enter the life of the kingdom.

WHAT DOES THIS SAY TO US TODAY?

For one thing this conversation reminds us that *any life can be changed by God through Christ*. Interestingly enough, there are two extremes in this regard. There is the fellow who feels no changes are possible because he is beyond the limits for redemption. As to the former one recalls that married couples' class teacher who had each wife and husband write down the changes they felt they should make as individuals to make their marriage more successful. The lists were not long. Then each mate was asked to list the changes he or she felt desirable in the other partner to his marriage. You can imagine that those lists ran into some lengthy detail! Try that sometime if you feel you need no changes to make your home happier.

The other extreme finds those who feel they have slipped so far from the center of life, which is God, that the long way back home can never be safely traversed. Yet Jesus was always reminding his hearers of the basic fact of the Christian faith that none is beyond the pale, no one wanders so far from the fold that the shepherd cannot or will not seek him out.

The grace of God seeks out every sinner and calls him to repentance

and restoration to the fellowship. That may say something special to you. Particularly, if you find yourself in some prodigal experience in a far country away from God. Here is a gospel that says there is never a hopeless person. The amazing grace of God can save you as it has many before you. But there must be the responding faith on your part, a faith to believe that God's grace does extend to you, that his goodness is for you, that your life is indeed hid with Christ in God! Jesus set up kingdom citizenship qualifications as having to do with being born anew of the spirit. But he indicated that this experience can come into any life and that life can be changed through God's grace and love. They used to sing about this in Methodist camp meetings:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Another thing Jesus is saying to us here, I believe, is that *spiritual rebirth makes a recognizable difference in our lives*. Bishop Arthur J. Moore tells of a young man who was converted in a revival meeting in the South. Soon thereafter he left for a period of three months to work in a lumber camp, whose moral reputation left much to be desired. His home church offered prayers regularly for his spiritual safety in that environment. On his return they inquired as to how he had been treated in that rough situation. The newly made Christian replied that he had gotten along fine; they treated him well. "They never found out about my conversion."

Well, there are persons who have a sort of inverted hypocrisy which does not allow them to live as they feel or believe for fear others will mock or scorn them. Thus there may be persons in your place of business who are active Christians elsewhere, but you have never found out through association with them. Jesus is saying the person who has

had the spiritual renewal which prepares one for kingdom citizenship gives evidence of the difference that comes in life in this fashion. Can people tell about you, or would they be surprised to learn you are a part of the Christian fellowship?

Finally, I think Jesus says here that *spiritual conversion is a combination of grace and faith*. The chance to live the life of the Christian comes through no merit on our part but through the goodness of God and because of his grace. The extra something you have in life is not yours because you are better than others. But through God's grace and goodness we all have the blessings we enjoy. God moves in our direction before we move in his. He comes down the road to meet us. Indeed the picture of him waiting for us is perhaps even more precise.

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of Thee.⁴

The three steps one must take in the direction of spiritual rebirth are oft-repeated in Christian circles. But consider them in the context of this conversation of the Master. First, one must *acknowledge his need*. We must see ourselves as powerless to effect our own salvation. We must see ourselves for what we have become, and then Jesus can help us see what we might become through God's grace and our faith.

Alcoholics Anonymous does not have a corner on this first step, although it is graphically illustrated in their procedure. They accept no one as a candidate for the long road back to sobriety until that person is willing to acknowledge he has slipped beyond his own human power to redeem and needs the power of God in his life and the support of his fellows. In the same fashion rebirth for the Christian begins with an awareness of need and an acknowledgment of sin.

The second step is to *make a definite decision for Christ*. Nothing in

⁴ Author unknown.

life gets done without definite decisions being made. You may consider the purchase of a house. You may think about it, pray for guidance, ask others about its price and worth, check off the desirable features, examine your bank account and your anticipated financial resources. But until you sign on the dotted line, there is no final decision. So it must be in this matter of Christian experience. Because many congregations do not practice the revivalistic approach of asking one to come to the altar and publicly accept Christ in an emotional kind of sentimental spirituality does not mean they do not believe in conversion! In fact you did make public confession of faith when you united with your church. There was that moment when you stepped out from the congregation and walked forward to the altar to indicate your willingness to seek the spiritual rebirth, which Christ offers in this fellowship. Your decision may have been made years before. Your commitment may have been made and renewed many times prior to those moments. But somewhere and sometime, many times perhaps, you have stood up to be counted for Christ. So must it be in those lives where this has never happened before. Only in this way can there be the spiritual rebirth for which Jesus asks.

This leads to the third step, which is continuous throughout our lives. We are called to *commit our lives to God through Christ for all of life*. There are some who believe you can stop in this process with the second step. But as I see it, we must experience this spiritual rebirth every day of our life in the sense that we commit all we have and are each day anew to Christ. Commitment is of little significance that is not renewed frequently. Each service of worship, each experience of prayer and fellowship in your church is calculated to offer you the opportunity to step up to Christ and say, "I believe in God as you revealed him. I want that spiritual fellowship about which you speak. Help me to be born anew that I too may see the kingdom of God."

To the Samaritan Woman —

ABOUT LIFE'S SPIRITUAL POSSIBILITIES

3

¶ There He came to a little town called Sychar, which is near the historic plot of land that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph, and "Jacob's Spring" was there. Jesus, tired with the journey, sat down beside it. The time was about mid-day. Presently, a Samaritan woman arrived to draw some water.

"Please give Me a drink," Jesus said to her, for His disciples had all gone away to the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to Him, "How can you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (For Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans.)

"If you knew what God can give," Jesus replied, "and if you knew Who it is that said to you, 'Give Me a drink,' I think you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water!"

"Sir," said the woman, "you have nothing to draw water with and this well is deep—where can you get your living water? Are you a greater man than our ancestor, Jacob, who gave us this well, and drank here himself with his family, and his cattle?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I will give him will never be thirsty again. For My gift will become a spring in the man himself, welling up into eternal life."

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may

TO THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

stop being thirsty—and not have to come here to draw water any more!"

"Go and call your husband and then come back here," said Jesus to her.

"I haven't got a husband!" the woman replied.

"Yes, you are quite right in saying, 'I haven't got a husband,'" replied Jesus, "for you have had five husbands and the man you have now is not your husband at all. Yes, you spoke the simple truth when you said that."

"Sir," said the woman again, "I can see that you are a prophet! . . ."

"Of course I know that Messiah is coming," returned the woman, "you know, the One Who is called Christ. When He comes He will make everything plain to us."

"I am Christ, speaking to you now," said Jesus.

At this point the disciples arrived, and were very surprised to find Him talking to a woman, but none of them asked, "What do You want?" or "What are You talking to her about?" So the woman left her water-pot behind and went into the town and began to say to the people, "Come out and see the man who told me everything I've ever done! Can this be 'Christ'?" So they left the town and started to come to Jesus.

(John 4:5-19, 25-30)

THE LOW USE OF HIGH MOMENTS

An American tourist recently wrote of his disappointment in a group of fellow Americans, who were in the same touring party visiting various places in Europe. In Rome, for several days, this small group of men and women each morning after breakfast would sit down in the game room of the hotel and spend the entire day playing bridge. While the rest of the tourist party was being guided through the buildings and places of historical and traditional interest, these card players

AND JESUS SAID . . .

saw only the game room. Here was no censure of bridge playing but rather of a callousness to the possibilities of the moment. The short time one is at an historical shrine suggests something more than to spend time dealing cards, when there is so much of interest and enlightenment that one could be seeing. Here were potential high moments that many of us would make many sacrifices to enjoy, and these cardplayers were making very low use of them.

Well, how many of us have come face to face with some significant moment and have muffed it by giving it sparse attention? How many of them have we missed out on completely or leveled way down the scale because we failed to respond to their great spiritual possibilities? How often our callous indifference has insulated us against life's highest and best moment!

Thus, apparently, it was in the conversation which draws our attention here to the wellcurb near Sychar in Samaria. Jesus is setting forth in reply to some very inane questions the simple factors involved in becoming a Christian disciple. There are some key phrases that offer insight into the meaning of this conversation for us.

IF YOU KNEW . . .

We are introduced to the woman at the well as one who had come at noontime to draw water. It was the hottest time of the day, and the well was usually deserted. Why did she come then? Perhaps she was a social outcast and the other women scorned her. Perhaps she was getting water for the men in a nearby field, who were resting during the lunch hour. Maybe she was just naturally late in getting things done. At any rate she was about a mile from the village where she lived. She had come this far for water because this was a special well which Jacob had ordered dug. It was 100 feet deep and 7½ feet in diameter and was fed by springs as well as rainfall. There was a sacred element, too, in that the water was given them by their father Jacob generations ago.

Jesus' request for a drink was not out of order. Her rejoinder about Jews and Samaritans was a statement of fact. But it came as amusing satire more than refusal of the request. In addition a rabbi was not supposed to address a woman in public, even one he knew, let alone a stranger such as in this situation. But Jesus had no rope and no bucket and no possibility of water unless someone drew from the well for him. His had been a hot journey, and Jesus was weary. The natural thing was to ask for the refreshment of a drink of cold water.

But that request led into a conversation which has special significance for us today, as well as the woman at the well. Jesus introduces the idea of living water, and it becomes a self-disclosure of his Messiahship. Thus he says to her in the words of our text, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." He is calling to her attention that she needs to understand the free gift of God, which is a kind of living water springing up within life and making possible an eternal spiritual vitality. The water which Christ gives is an eternal spring within the human heart. To possess it is to assure oneself of a continuing satisfaction of thirst for life's values. One has "the spontaneous energy of unfailing interior grace."¹ If we only knew the Christ and the blessing which God has given us through him, then we, too, could have the blessing of the living water of life.

For if we knew him, then we would accept him. The woman there at Jacob's well is a good example of one who could well have used what Christ could bring into her life, if she had only known who he was when she raised her silly questions. Her name is legion among us. We nip around at the fringes of faith without ever getting to the heart of it. We pay lip service to a form of religion or religious practice but refuse or fail to take seriously its implications for our daily living. We hear Jesus' word about life-giving water, but we are unaware of what he means. If we knew what it was all about, we would jump at the

¹ W. F. Howard, *The Interpreter's Bible*, VIII, 523.

chance he offers. But not knowing, we often make low and insignificant use of potentially high moments. Worship becomes routine repetition of ritual and ceremony. Bible reading is perfunctory. Prayer is but a vague nod in the direction of God. These potential forces of spiritual dynamite have no firing pins to provide the spiritual impetus we need. They are real forces for vitality only when we know and accept Christ.

If we knew who this Christ is, *we would learn how unsatisfying are the material gifts which earth can offer us.* We live in a time when materialism is running rampant in totalitarian nations and free nations as well. In the former it is the political demand on the citizenry. In the latter it is the practical expression of what so many persons have come to think of as the final security. In a dry and barren time we grab onto that which we think will provide us with the satisfaction for our insatiable thirst. But materialism proves to be a mirage when it comes to a final showdown. There is a Moslem proverb which speaks to this condition:

Whoso craves wealth is like a man who drinks sea water;
the more he drinks, the more he increases his thirst,
and he ceases not to drink until he perishes.

However, those who have come to know Jesus as the Christ have discovered a new slant on life which suggests that the eternal satisfactions of life have to do with the eternal values alone. And these in turn come into the life that knows Christ and the God he came to reveal.

If we knew him, then *we could see clearly where the road of selfish living will always end up.* The prodigal son found it out the hard way. Life which is based on selfish search for satisfaction of the basic physical thirst and hunger of life will always wind up in a pig pen in some far country with the unsatisfied prodigal wanderer, envying the hogs the husks they eat. If this woman at the well could have known Jesus before, would she have moved from husband to husband in a

vague unending search for marital happiness? In Christ she would have discovered the index of happiness which grows out of understanding God and his way and will. She would have received the resources for living which come from God's hand through Jesus. Indeed, she apparently discovered this in her conversation with Jesus. His patience with her small talk paid off in her ultimate response.

If we knew Christ as his disciples and followers have known him, *we would learn how rich and exciting our Christian life can be.* Early in their lives we seem to create in the minds of our youth the idea that one's bank account is the most important factor in successful living. So we raise a generation of youth who measure everything in line with the dollar sign and assume all else is unexciting. But the true excitement of life can never be known, the wealth and richness of living is never discovered until one finds himself drawn up short by some penetrating questions from the Master of men, as we converse in a hot Samarian sun.

"If you knew the gift of God and who this is that speaks to you, you would ask him and he would have given you living water."

IF YOU UNDERSTOOD . . .

In commenting on this conversation, Bishop Gerald Kennedy suggests that the woman at the well of Jacob was trying to escape the serious implications of the conversation by silly smartness and cheap banter.² She starts out by countering his request with a "How come you speak to me, a woman, when the Jews and Samaritans have no dealings? Do you expect me to give a Jew a drink from this well?" And when Jesus speaks seriously to her about his station in life and the living spiritual water which is available through him, she replies in a silly and stupid way, "Are you a magician that you can draw water from a hundred foot well with no rope nor bucket?"

² *The Lion and the Lamb* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), p. 83.

AND JESUS SAID . . .

The conversation has a happy ending because of the persistence and patience of Jesus with the bantering woman. But if she had only understood who it was with whom she talked and what it was he was saying, she would have quickly discovered a new insight on life that could have lifted her above the drab vagrancy of a life of unsavory shunting from husband to husband.

There is always the danger of misunderstanding the proffered gifts of the Master and accepting only the lesser gifts he offers. The woman at the well thought she understood what he was saying about the water that will keep one from thirsting. She asked for it that she might avoid the daily drudgery of walking out to the well. Each day she trekked out and back with the water jar on her head or shoulder. She confused the living water of the Lord with the rainwater of the well of Jacob. In fact she thought Jesus was casting aspersions on the Sychar water. "If you drink this you will thirst again," he was saying about Jacob's water, "but the water I can give you will cause you never to thirst again." That was a touchy spot. Could be that one of her husbands had been public relations director for the Sychar Chamber of Commerce. Certainly she knew that Jacob's well was a cherished spot for all tourists passing through there, what with its reputation for clear, cold water. Then this Jewish stranger talks about the water he gives as being superior!

Many who followed Jesus then and now regard his leadership as important, primarily to satisfaction of the physical appetites. The crowds surged around him, watching for miracles and hoping for food for their bodies as well as their spirits. And on occasion he did feed them. But Jesus never worked any unnecessary miracles. For instance see here in this story an example. He is hungry and hot, thirsty and tired. Why not use his miraculous powers to provide food and drink for his disciples and himself? But he sends the disciples into the town a mile away to buy food, and he asks a drink from the first person

who comes to the well to draw water. Long before, in his wilderness temptations, he had determined that he would not be a temple-jumping Messiah whose main task was to work miracles for people who would be impressed and follow him.

Yet the cult of success and happiness is still with us. We have those who believe one should be morally good in order that he may be economically and socially successful. Such a person wants the blessing of God through Christ. Still he joins the woman at the well in asking that he be given the water so he won't have to trek to the well each hot noontime. There are preachers of nationwide note whose gospel seems to confuse the issue here. They seem to be identifying goodness with success and spiritual vitality with material blessings. But Jesus shunned that kind of combination. He was speaking here about a spiritual vitality that brings the greater gifts of life. And she, and many of us, never come close to seeing his point. If we understood who he is and what he says, then indeed we would be seeking the living water of spiritual vitality.

For Jesus is saying that we can have the indwelling spirit of God, which can come into every human heart. Along with it he brings the blessings of the divine presence into our human personalities and brings out in clear relief the divine imprint which is therein.

Here is the creative power of God which comes with its energizing dynamics into the life of drab dull persons and provides the power for self-renewal. Here is a force that can spell the difference between the monotonous routine of a modern person of Sychar, whose daily stint is about as inspiring as carrying a jar of water a mile from the village well. When one understands what Christ is about in his ministry and teaching, he sees the importance of the indwelling presence of Almighty God in the life of Jesus. And he sees this as an element for human realization as we share in the fellowship of Christ. "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me to drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

IF YOU BELIEVED . . .

The low use of high moments, then and now, most often grows out of a failure on the part of man to respond to God. When God's willingness to give is met by responsive and receptive faith on the part of the human personality, then things begin to happen in the human soul. When the woman at the well became serious and stopped bantering, her life became open to God. She was so captivated by the experience that she could run all the way back to town to tell her townspeople that this must be the Messiah, because he certainly possessed divine knowledge and insight. We don't know what happened to her after this. But it is entirely possible that she arose to the challenge of this high hour in her life and believed in God's revelation in Jesus, so that her life was transformed by the renewing of God's spirit within her.

Consider what happened in Sychar because of this woman's belief in Jesus. The villagers paid little attention to her before—other than to make a point of shunning her. Now they paid attention and trooped out the Shechem Road to Jacob's well to see this prophet. Jesus talked with them about his message of love that transcends racial barriers, that forgives any and all moral prodigals, and the divine love that can find expression in human hearts. Later the citizens of Sychar spoke gratefully to the outcast woman, no longer shunned and rejected. They said they now believed in Christ because they had heard him for themselves. But first they heard about Jesus from her! George W. Cornell calls her "the first recorded successful woman missionary for Christ."³ She brought her whole village to Jesus and they too believed in him.

If in your life there is a continuing round of routine, monotonous, day-by-day dullness, it may well be that you are failing to respond to the highest, which is found in God's call to the life of the Christian spirit. For things can happen in your life when you "let go and let

³ *They Knew Jesus* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1957), p. 110.

God," as someone has put it. God's willingness to give is not in question since Christ revealed the kind of father he is. The test comes in your willingness to respond and open your heart with a receptive faith to believe that God can do things in and through your life.

It all seems finally to be based on your beliefs. If you can believe, then, Jesus promised, all things will be possible. *For in that belief you hold, you can discover and build a faith which will hold you in the fellowship of man with God.* And to all who believed in him, the writer of the early church history reports, to them Christ gave power to become the very sons of God. And you can have that gift and that power, if you are receptive and responsive in your faith and through your life

The early Spaniards came to the eastern shores of Florida looking for a reported fountain of perpetual youth. To drink its waters, Ponce de Leon believed, was to restore one's youthfulness again. But the fountain was never found, although natives will show you places and springs that were thought for awhile to be the end of the search. Nor does history record the discovery of any such magical fountain anywhere.

Certainly, here is no assurance of perpetual youth in the living spiritual water from the fountain of life. But here is a perpetual fountain of creative Christian living. And it is available to every person of belief and faith. No rope or bucket needed—just faith to believe that God provides this creative fountain of perpetual spiritual vitality in and through Christ. This was Jesus' promise to the Samaritan woman.

Out of this faith and practice comes *the peace that passes all understanding.* We are a part of an age which almost desperately is searching for that elusive peace of mind and peace of soul which brings a calmness and happiness into human hearts. Yet so often we confuse a life of untrammeled bliss with the idea of peace of mind. Jesus doesn't call us to a life of completely smooth sailing, of effortless ease, and constant comfort.

Yes, Jesus provides a peace that passes human understanding. But it

is a disturbing peace at times, which leads us to stand up and be counted for controversial causes when we know that God calls us to bear Christian witness. His peace does not leave us in the lurch but brings us calmness amid confusion and poise amid perplexity. Nonetheless, it depends on how receptive we have been to God's willingness to give.

Joy that is deeper than any other joy can come into the opened heart of the Christian who seeks the promised blessing of God. Life more abundant than any other form of life is promised through the author of life. And power that can meet any demand of human existence is available through this divine source of dynamic living in the Christian pattern. All this is implied, I think, in Jesus' conversation with the Sychar woman about spiritual water that brings creative spiritual energy into every life. Jesus offers all of us the peace and joy and abundance of Christian blessedness, as well as the spiritual power of Christian faith and life. This is not dated. It is available today even as it was then, for all of us as well as for the Samaritan woman.

Once a young and brilliant student, who had indulged in about all the sins the flesh could provide, was seriously searching for life's meaning. In desperation he had turned from the paganism of his father and was seeking the way out in the Christian faith of his mother. In Milan Augustine was torn between his ideals and his conduct, and prayed for relief from his torment. He heard a voice telling him to take up and read the scripture. He picked up the Epistle to the Romans and read Paul's words about putting on the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his *Confessions* Augustine tells of his emotions at the moment: "I neither cared nor needed to read any further. At the close of the sentence as if a ray of certainty were poured into my heart—the clouds of hesitation fled at once."⁴

And Williston Walker, the church historian, adds, "From that moment he had peace of mind and the sense of divine power to overcome

⁴ Book IX, Paragraph 29.

TO THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

his sins which he had thus far sought in vain." Later one of his boon companions called out, "Augustine, it is I." The saint replied, "It is no longer I."

So it is for all who accept the Master's proffered gift of living water from the fountain of life. If you know, if you understand, and if you believe this giver of creative and vital living, so may it be for you!

To Zacchaeus —

ABOUT COMPARATIVE VALUES

4

¶ Then he went into Jericho and was making his way through it. And here we find a man called Zacchaeus, a chief collector of taxes and wealthy, wanting to see what sort of person Jesus was. But the crowd prevented him from seeing him, for he was very short. So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to get a view of him as he was heading that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and saw the man and said,

“Zacchaeus, hurry up and come down. I am going to be your guest today.”

So Zacchaeus hurriedly climbed down and gladly welcomed him. But the bystanders muttered their disapproval saying,

“Now he has gone to stay with a sinner.”

But Zacchaeus himself stopped and said to the Lord,

“Look, sir, I will give half my property to the poor. And if I have swindled anybody out of anything I will pay him back four times as much.”

Jesus said to him,

“Salvation has come to this house today.”

Then he added to the people,

“Zacchaeus is a descendant of Abraham as much as you are, and it was the lost that the Son of Man came to seek—and to save.”

(Luke 19:1-10)

THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

In Jerome K. Jerome's drama, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, a Stranger from the streets enters a boardinghouse in London to find his humble lodging in the only room that is vacant. Because of his presence in the house and his coming and going, a change comes over the other residents of the house. Suspicion, resentment, covetousness, hypocrisy, lust, and the dull drabness of mediocre living seem to disappear from the house because of the influence of the Stranger. Their lives were transformed. They were never the same again.

So it is with Zacchaeus the day he met Jesus on the streets of Jericho. His somewhat inglorious past was redeemed. His drab, friendless, money-mad present was transformed, and his heretofore dubious future was completely redirected. From the detailed record in the Gospels, which appears only in Luke, note some phrases that give a thumbnail sketch of the transforming experience and the transformed life of Zacchaeus. "And there was a man named Zacchaeus. . . . he sought to see Jesus who he was. . . . And he made haste and came down. . . . and said unto the Lord; behold . . . I give . . . and I restore." (Luke 19:2-3, 6, 8 K.J.V.)

Here in the conversation of the Master with the tax collector of Jericho we can see the transforming power of Christian faith bring about a life-changing experience.

THE SCENE

Jericho was called the city of palms. It had quite a history. Mark Anthony presented it as a gift to Cleopatra, along with Arabia. Eder-sheim reports that there Herod the Great had died, ordering with his dying moments the slaughter of the foremost Jewish citizens that there might be mourning in the city when he passed. His son Archelaus built there the magnificent palace set in beautiful gardens. In the streets of Jericho one could find publicans and courtiers, fanatics and wandering ascetics, traders who were traveling the caravan route

from the North and the East, robbers and soldiers, priests from Jerusalem and pilgrims en route to the annual festivals at the Holy City. That was ancient Jericho. Today it is but a tiny village of peasant huts among scattered ruins—almost a ghost city with none of the splendor and little of the busy traffic of its remembered past.

Jesus was on his last journey to Jerusalem. He and his disciples were moving toward that inevitable conflict which would lead to the crucifixion. They came to Jericho and were greeted by a throng of people who had heard of Jesus. Perhaps some of them were pilgrims bound for Jerusalem, who had heard and seen him in their home villages. Word of his coming had spread through Jericho so that Zacchaeus the tax gatherer had heard of his arrival at the edge of the town. For some reason he wanted very much to get a glimpse of this teacher.

Zacchaeus was one of the most hated men in the community. He, along with others of his kind, had purchased from Rome the tax collecting concession. He apparently was one of the chief tax men of the city, and that assures us that he was the wealthy man which tradition has described him to be. He was the assessor and collector, and he had the seal of Rome for authority. But to gain this lucrative position, he had to sacrifice friends and community standing. He was a quisling who was scorned by the Romans as a compromiser, essential to their financial structure but not to their social life. And he was hated by his own people, the Jews, because they regarded him as one who had sold out to the occupation forces in return for the material wealth garnered in his tax-collecting position. They shunned him completely, and his was doubtless as lonely a life as one could find in that ancient city.

Thus it was completely unexpected that Jesus should pause under the sycamore tree where Zacchaeus had sought sufficient height to assure him of a glimpse of the Master as he passed by. He was a short man, the record says, and could not see over the heads of the crowd. He took his dignity and position in hand and climbed the tree, which

may well have been on his own property or nearby. He was hopeful that none would happen to look up and see him there. But Jesus stopped under the tree and looked up to call him by name and issue his invitation. My father says this verse of scripture gives the biblical basis for any minister inviting himself home with any member of the congregation for Sunday dinner after the service! At any rate Zacchaeus had no thought that he of all people would be selected for the honor of entertaining the visiting notable and his followers.

The crowd shared his stunned feeling. They gasped at the words of Jesus and murmured that he was going to be the guest of a known sinner. He passed by the religious leadership of the city, who might have welcomed the conversation of the visiting rabbi. He did not think to take a close look at some of the faithful and pious Pharisees, who would have been honored to be singled out for hosting purposes. He picked a sinner and answered, once and for all symbolically, the question that every generation has raised about the sinners and outcasts and the association of God with them. God is never out-of-bounds in visiting his children. They are all his who "make haste to come down" and receive him into their homes and their hearts.

THE MAN

Zacchaeus must have known of Jesus to let his curiosity carry him so far. It was no small decision to run the risks of a scornful crowd in his climbing the tree to see Jesus. One commentator suggests that if Zacchaeus had been a tall man or one of average height, he might never have met Jesus, for he would have been lost in the anonymity of the crowd. His shortness of stature and the demands it made on him at this moment set him apart and called the attention of Jesus to his presence.

When he climbed down from the tree into the presence of Jesus, he saw himself for what he had become. Here was a man who, if nothing else, was greedy after gold. Money had become his god—it had to be

AND JESUS SAID . . .

in order for him to have paid the price of being a social outcast. He entered his tax-collecting position advisedly, I am certain. He knew it could promise abundant wealth at the price of friendship and fellowship with his people. But he had determined that money was life's greatest value, and he pursued it for happiness. He got the money, but that happiness element proved elusive until this day when he met Jesus. He had sacrificed the dignity of character and the integrity of position in the religious community to get the lovely home and the hired servants who were serving Jesus as his guest. Self-respect was not a part of his life at the moment, and he could see his own lack mirrored in the eyes of Jesus. Peace of mind and heart were constantly eluding this little man. He was shunned by day and victimized by his unfulfilled dreams at night. Life had become money-mad in the truest sense of the word. He found he couldn't buy what he thought money would secure for him.

So when he looked up into the eyes of the Master, his shabby character, his drab, friendless existence, the smoldering hatred of the crowd—these all showed up the kind of person he had become. For when anyone looks at the Master, it is to find himself asking the question, "What does my life add up to?" You dare not look into the eyes of Jesus if you are unwilling to be honest in seeing yourself for what you are.

Those who came into the presence of Jesus felt the moral challenge of his very presence. He didn't have to say much. He looked at them without any look of accusation. But to see him was to stand self-accused. Moral impurities of thought and deed suddenly displayed themselves for the shabbiness they are. Selfish motives seemed so out of place. Money lust came into the bright light of life's values, and one found them to be without the glitter he thought them to have, and powerless to purchase the desirable values of a life of joy and worthiness. The comparison that one inevitably makes in such an encounter

with the Lord leaves him reeling in his moral bankruptcy. And so it was with Zacchaeus, when he met Jesus that day.

But he found the end of his desperate search here in this conversation. He had been looking so long for a transforming power that would lift him out of the drab money-mad routine of his life. Those hours of enforced loneliness, that silent treatment from all who knew him, that sacrifice of life's highest values for what money could buy—these all were at an end. Here in this moment Zacchaeus sees himself for what he has become. *Now, with the help of Jesus he sees himself for what he might become.* And that is life's turning point for any individual. To see what we might become with the help of Christ is the purpose of this divine-human encounter, which comes to all of us on our pathway through life.

Had Zacchaeus turned away from the eyes of Jesus in shame, when he saw himself mirrored there as the moral prodigal which he had become, life would have been even more severe than before. For he was face to face with the moment to decide. He couldn't have both his money lust and the life that love brings into human existence. Love of money or love of life—this was the choice.

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood,
For the good or evil side.

Zacchaeus knew what came from the former loyalty—that was his life. Now he comes face to face with what the latter could mean for him. For he sees the contrast between what he was because of his previous choices and what he could become through choosing the highest and best in Christ. The record says "he made haste to come down" out of his sycamore tree of selfish pride, scornful arrogance, and money lust to receive the Lord of life, who could give him what he had sought so desperately to purchase but had found his resources un-

equal to the price. Now when he learns the price, his love of money is no longer the dominant motive in life, and he receives Jesus into his home and into his heart. He hurries to come down and receive Jesus. And he becomes a transformed person.

THE RESULTS

Thomas Kelly has written words that indicate the demands that are made on one who comes face to face with God in Christ.

No man can look on God and live, live in his own faults, live in the shadow of the least self-deceit, live in harm toward His least creatures.¹

Under the gaze of Jesus Zacchaeus seemed quite ready to confess his faults. He had long been kidding himself that "This is the life!" Now it looks pretty shabby alongside the life of the Master. He was a tax collector, and, therefore, it could be assumed that he had demanded taxes which were all the traffic would allow without appealing to Rome, but which were more than any fair evaluation would have levied. He had hated, with the venom of the social outcast, those who scorned him for what he was—a compromiser with Rome, one who sold out his conscience for the wealth of his occupation.

With Jesus looking at him in that friendly but morally firm way, with the challenge of his presence serving as a moral imperative, Zacchaeus had either to turn away, as had the rich young ruler in another city not many days before because his money meant too much to him, or he had to confess his sins before God and man and seek the way out of his condition. This, I think, gives the insight we need to understand Jesus' words about a wealthy man entering the kingdom of heaven. I think he was talking about the fact that the love of money is the root of evil. When one succumbs to its lure, he cannot help himself. He will determine every choice, indeed every attitude, on the basis of its financial results.

¹ *A Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 65.

One day I was sitting in a barber chair in a South Dakota city when a passing plumber hailed the barber who was cutting my hair with this question, "Did you hear about Clem's brother-in-law?" Then he proceeded to tell of Joe's accidental death on the night before. He was working after dark when his tractor slid into a ditch and toppled over on top of him. The plumber commented, "Never could figure that guy out. He owned a quarter section free and clear. That's about enough for the average fellow, but not for Joe. He had to keep getting more. Why he just got four more quarters awhile back, and he's mortgaged to the hilt on 'em. That's why he was working so hard—trying to get caught up on his payments. Well, he don't need all that land now!"

There is no evidence that Joe was dishonest, but he had succumbed to the lure of property and money, and in a real sense having made his choice, sacrificed his life for what he couldn't take with him.

Try this sometime: hold a silver dollar close to each eye, and you discover you can see nothing else! Life can become utilitarian in being the means for providing the happiness that money can buy. Morals are relative in social and business relationship and can be determined by how much one can get by with without being caught. Tax reports can be doctored. Stockholders can be quietly fleeced, within the letter of the law. Consumers can bear the burden of higher prices, so profits can be greater, though the product is not up to par. All this comes about because one sees life only through the dollar sign.

Well, if you are there on the spot with Zacchaeus with the eyes of Jesus boring their friendly but firm moral challenge into your heart, the choice must be made. The moment to decide has come. You are free to choose. Either Jesus goes home with you as your guest, and you will give up that which up to now has been your main drive in life, or you will allow Jesus to pass on down the street of your Jericho town and leave you to go back to your lonely life of money lust. But that was all over for Zacchaeus. He confessed his sins right then and there,

so impelling was the moral challenge of the presence of God in Christ.

Confession for him was accompanied, as it must be in every instance, with repentance and restitution. He said, "I give and I restore." This always follows one's encounter with Jesus, who gives so much and restores so much to the human heart that has made itself bereft of the true values of life. Confession of sin has a therapeutic effect in many instances. Just getting it off our chest, after living with it in a cramped fearfulness that others may learn of it, is a wholesome experience. But you can never stop there and hope to gain the experience of Christ that completely transforms life. Repentance demands restitution and change. We just don't say, "So sorry!" and then assume this takes care of the situation. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Claudius, the king, faces such a reality when he soliloquizes.

My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence? ²

Of course, the answer is no! We must make, in our moment of decision, a decisive break with the past and do all in our power to correct the wrong we may have done and which now, before Christ, we are confessing.

So Zacchaeus promises first of all to divide his wealth and give alms of half his goods. And then he will fulfill the Roman pattern of restoring fourfold whatever he may have taken in excess of a fair tax. That could have well-nigh broken him financially. And perhaps it did. But it also destroyed the last barrier, in this instance, between a man and his salvation. However, if you take refuge in the thought

² Act III, scene 3.

that you have so little of money and material resources that this conversation says nothing to you, recall that Jesus was dealing specifically with the sins of a given person. When he looks at you do not think you can gloss over what may be equally as great a barrier to your Christian transformation as money was for Zacchaeus. Pride, lust, gluttony, jealousy, intolerance, anxiety—these are deadly sins that kill the spirit. Life can be restored only when one meets up with the Master and is willing to pay the price for the transforming power of Christian faith, as he accepts God in Christ.

Here is what William James defined conversion to be, and see here reflected the experience that came into the life of Zacchaeus. But more important see the experience that could be yours.

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold on religious realities.⁸

Zacchaeus found in this conversion experience the transforming power of Christian faith as Jesus became the leader of his life. Through the Lord Christ Zacchaeus found the power to live in this new-found pattern.

In Lloyd Douglas' novel, *The Robe*, Justus is talking to Marcellus about Jesus:

I only know that he is alive; sometimes I feel aware of him as if he were close by. It keeps you honest. You have no temptation to cheat anyone, or to lie to anyone, or hurt anyone, when for all you know Jesus is standing beside you.

⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902), p. 189.

AND JESUS SAID . . .

Marcellus replies that he would be very uncomfortable being watched by some invisible presence. But Justus answers with these words:

Not if that presence helped you to defend yourself against yourself. It is a great satisfaction to have someone standing by—to keep you at your best.⁴

Christ and the transforming experience of being a Christian can do that for you!

⁴ *The Robe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 441.

To the Chief Priests —

ABOUT AUTHORITY

5

So they came once more to Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the Temple, the Chief Priests, elders and Scribes approached him, and asked,

"What authority have you for what you're doing? And who gave you permission to do these things?"

"I am going to ask you one question," replied Jesus, "and if you answer me, I will tell you what authority I have for what I do. The baptism of John, now—did it come from Heaven or was it purely human? Tell me that."

At this they argued with each other, "If we say from Heaven, he will say, 'then why didn't you believe in him?' but if we say it was purely human, well . . ." For they were frightened of the people, since all of them believed that John was a real prophet. So they answered Jesus,

"We do not know."

"Then I cannot tell you by what authority I do these things," returned Jesus.

(Mark 11:27-33)

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

This record in Mark's Gospel of the challenge of Jesus' authority is the first of a series of stories that describe attempts to trap Jesus by members of the Sanhedrin or by the Sadducees who controlled that body which was authoritative in Jewish religious administration. They were trying to get an admission from him that could be framed as a

specific charge, which would warrant the death penalty and could be laid before the Roman procurator.

Palm Sunday had come in that first century and with it the reception of Jesus with wild acclaim by the Messiah-hungry, Savior-hopeful multitudes in Jerusalem. So great was the apparent impact of this reception that the leaders or the organized religious forces in the temple realized that this teacher from Nazareth could make trouble for them. Then on the day after this triumphal entry Jesus entered the temple courtyard and in a blaze of righteous indignation overturned the tables of the money-changers and the sellers of animals and birds for sacrifice. This open act, which threatened the financial security of the religious leadership which held a monopoly on the temple markets, was enough to send members of the Sanhedrin into secret session to determine how to meet the challenge of Jesus.

So it was that on Tuesday they confronted Jesus in the temple courtyard with these words, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" It was as if a licensing bureau were to confront one to whom it had not issued a license and asked "Let me see your license!", smugly confident in the knowledge that none had been issued from the bureau.

AUTHORITY CHALLENGED

If we are to get the proper background for this conversation, we must clearly understand that all teaching for Judaism in that day had to be authoritative. How else could it continue the traditions and practices which had grown out of the ancient scriptures and prophecies? Only those could teach with authority who had been approved by the duly constituted religious hierarchy. Its judgment went unchallenged because of its status as the religious supreme court of the Hebrew nation.

The body of teaching was handed down from teacher to disciple, from rabbi to pupil. A man qualified to teach as he expounded his knowledge of the ideas of his teacher and demonstrated the facility

with which he quoted the teacher's words. In fact, according to Dr. Alfred Edersheim, the highest honor to which a scholar aspired was "that he was like a well-plastered cistern, from which not a drop had leaked of what had been poured into it." One could go about preaching, or he could be an expository teller of legends, Edersheim reports, "but to teach was not his privilege without duly granted authorization."¹

Thus these Jewish leaders were on safe ground in questioning Jesus' authority to teach in the temple courtyard and to do the things he had done. The Nazareth carpenter had been severe in his condemnation of the religious leaders. He had been positive and authoritative as he drove the money-changers out of the temple yard. And apparently this quickly called meeting had been held by the members of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body and judicial council of the Jews. They conferred as to what to do about this serious threat to their authority and position. After all they were, in a sense, the ultimate in court authority in Judaism, for here was the court of highest appeal in matters based on Mosaic law. The members of the Sanhedrin were naturally upset at this insult to their prestige, not to mention their loss of personal profit from the actions of Jesus in condemning the use of the temple precincts as a place for the buying and selling of livestock and the banking function of exchange. They did not feel their position strong enough to oppose Jesus openly. They were shrewd enough to know this might bring trouble from the people. They resorted to legality. Their representatives came to Jesus informally—but still in the name of the law.

One sees this procedure illustrated in Meredith Willson's Broadway musical, *The Music Man*. Much of the action of the stage presentation revolves around the efforts of the mayor and the village council of River City to check on the credentials of Professor Harold Hill, the self-styled music man who is seeking to organize a youth band in the

¹ *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* (New York: A. D. F. Randolph and Company) II, p. 381.

community. In the same fashion the chief priests were hounding Jesus with a similar question, "By what authority are you doing these things?"

Credit should be given where credit is due, however. We should be clear in our understanding of the integrity and piety of most of these Pharisees and religious rulers. In their adherence to the letter of Hebraic law, they were meticulous almost to a fault. But they stood firm for the protection of their ancient faith and rites from desecration at the hands of pagan Rome or unsympathetic Greeks. Indeed, when the Greeks under Antiochus Epiphanes had swarmed over the holy city of Jerusalem in 168 b.c., violating the temple, sacrificing swine on the altar of Jehovah, and even destroying the rolls of the sacred Law, it was the Pharisees, the puritans of the people, who maintained the tradition of courageous resistance. They were seeking now in similar vein to protect their people from the pagan faith and morals of Rome. The Pharisees were good men in many ways. Their conflict with Jesus had in it the seeds of their selfish love of power and prestige. But it also carried something of their efforts to defend their idea of what Judaism should be in light of Mosaic law.

In his biography of Jesus Harry Emerson Fosdick points up this issue. He writes:

There are two basic ways of fulfilling the great commandments of Judaism. One the Pharisees tried. They drew out corollary rules from major laws, deduced specific regulations from general principles, created detailed precepts applying to endless concrete situations, and so built up their immense and complicated legal system. Jesus, however, used another method. If a man does not hate, he will not kill; if he does not lust, he will not commit adultery; if his word is simply "Yes" or "No" he will not break his oath; if evil thoughts do not proceed out of his heart, he will do no evil; if he is a fig tree, he will bear no thistles. Jesus did come to fulfill the law, but by a method that could not be reconciled with Pharisaic legalism.²

² *The Man From Nazareth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 90.

So the Pharisees came to Jesus there in the temple courtyard to inquire concerning his authorization. Since they did the authorizing, and he had not been officially certified by their group, the question could not be thought improper by the crowds. And it might well lead them into a situation where they could banish Jesus and his teaching very quickly. So they asked for the credentials that could certify the words and deeds of those two days.

Their words of question have found echo many times since, as inquiry concerning rights, authority, and permission have been raised. I well recall an experience when the Seminary Singers of Boston University were touring Florida in 1941. We came to the Bok Singing Tower and donned our colorful robes and surplices for some color movies and pictures in that shrine of beauty. We were lined up on the sundial side of the tower, in our regular singing formation. Someone suggested we sing the 130th Psalm, a traditional one for Methodists, since it is the one John Wesley heard sung on the day of his Aldersgate experience. We were singing this marvelous religious anthem and moving musically to its dramatic climax, when a man came rushing up to our director and interrupted our number by calling out "Stop!" The notes gurgled off into discord. The man with a mixture of horror and anger inquired of our leader, "Who gave you permission to sing here?" The reply was, of course, we had not thought permission necessary. "But," said he, "we do not permit singing here, and you will kindly desist." When he learned who we were, that all were ministers, and our repertoire was one of sacred music, he seemed a bit apologetic for his action and words. He took us on a tour of the tower itself, a rare treat, I can assure you. Somehow that scene comes back to me whenever I try to visualize this situation of Jesus in the temple with his authority challenged. "Who gave you permission to teach here?"

There is even here a hint of Satanic origin for his authority. After all the Sanhedrin knew nothing officially about any credentials. Could

he then be a representative of the devil? How else could he work the works he had been reported as doing, or how else take unto himself the authority to challenge the temple authorities?

In response Jesus counters with this question concerning their judgment of the authority of John the Baptist. He puts them on the spot. For if they replied that John was a prophet of God and his credentials in order, then the crowd would surge in with the question as to why not Jesus? He was a former follower who had picked up the thread of John's message. Indeed, John had pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of messianic prophecy! However, if the Pharisees denied John's authority as being from heaven, then they ran the risk of arousing the wrath of the people. For this prophet of God, John the Baptist, was a martyred hero in the eyes of the people. So the priests denied any knowledge of how to answer. On that basis Jesus refused to continue the discussion.

We should note once again the basis of this challenge of Jesus' authority by the religious leaders. Kirsopp Lake has written that Jesus' overt attack on the financial interests of the priests and the Sadducees in his Monday cleansing of the temple was the real cause for the accusations which they brought against Jesus and was the danger that really led the authorities of the Sanhedrin to plot his arrest and death penalty.³ The ideas of Jesus they could offset with the authority they possessed. But their financial security was threatened! That threat must be removed—in legal fashion, of course!

AUTHORITY VALIDATED

The life and ministry of Jesus speak concerning his authority. He refused to qualify his authority or to set forth his credentials as proof of the validity of his teaching by word or certificate. We who have the advantage of twenty centuries of Christian experience are aware of all the proof needed to accept the divine qualifications of Jesus. But one can find four unmistakably clear reasons for accepting the authority

³ *The Stewardship of Faith* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1915), p. 46.

of Jesus. In them one sees the answer to the question of the chief priests in their temple courtyard conversation.

First, there is the *authority of obedience to unenforceable obligations*. The cross stands at the center of worship as a symbol of this authority. No laws could be legislated that would force a man to choose the cross. It was not required of Jesus legally that he accept crucifixion. Opportunities for escape were plentiful right up to the last. In accepting the cross, he was taking upon himself what none could legally or rightfully demand.

Late in 1957 the city of Cleveland, Ohio, had some trouble with vandalism in certain sections of the city. Negro families were purchasing homes in neighborhoods which were previously all-white. Their houses were smeared with paint, windows were broken, and the premises defaced. The situation seemed ripe for a race riot. But a group of ministers stepped into the picture. They did not call meetings to protest the vandalism. They did not moralize on the responsibilities of brotherhood. They went to work quietly to repair the damage. Armed with paint brushes, ladders, and uniformed only in coveralls, they repainted the houses which had been damaged. What's more, they promised to go on doing this so long as the vandalism continued. But their weapons proved effective in putting a stop to what otherwise might have flared into the flame of rioting.

There was no outward force that prevailed on these clergymen to take the positive action they took. It was the unpopular move. They were taunted and ridiculed at first. They went beyond any demand of modern society—except the demand of Christ who called them to Christian witness and service. Their authority was in their willingness to sacrifice and to serve.

And so Jesus went far beyond what the law demanded in terms of sacrifice. He need not fly into the face of the open opposition which would eventually, by fair means or foul, do him to death. But those long hours in prayer, coming to their culmination there in the Garden

AND JESUS SAID . . .

of Gethsemane on Thursday night of that historic week we commemorate during Holy Week, had strengthened his inner resources so that he *must* be obedient to the unenforceable obligation that the faithful Christian is called upon to recognize as part and parcel of his discipleship.

Second, one finds Jesus' authority validated in *his clear sense of divine direction and high purpose*. The compass I carry in my automobile brings a lot of good-natured kidding about my lack of a good sense of direction. Without it I can get lost even with the simplest set of directions. The words "You can't miss it" do not apply to me! Those of you who share this weakness know how we admire one who has a keen sense of direction. We can depend on him when he says that north is that way, even though we are certain it is in a different direction!

As a matter of fact many people are lost on the road to life because they have never gained a clear sense of direction. They wander aimlessly until someone with a compass or a knowledge of direction comes along to give them a hand. Jesus had a clear sense of his direction. He moved unceasingly and unflinchingly in that direction through all the days of his ministry. After a long night of spiritual reconnaissance on a mountaintop in prayer the record says, "He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." His previous resolution was now confirmed. He would move in the direction of a showdown with the authorities. Here was God's call. Anything less than going to Jerusalem would be compromise. Jesus could not compromise and maintain his self-imposed high sense of purpose and God-ordained mission.

One sees this illustrated particularly on that first Palm Sunday. Jesus entered Jerusalem to be greeted by the throngs of pilgrims, as the answer to their prayers. This was the Messiah. This was the modern David who had come in God's good time to restore the lost glory of Israel. He would call down legions of angels from heaven and

catastrophically wipe out the Roman power and set up the reign of God's kingdom. The basic idea was held in common—the Messiah and God's kingdom. But the people had different ideas of the nature of the Messiah. They wanted none of this riding-on-a-donkey, turn-the-other-cheek, love-your-fellows-and-God-will-love-you kind of religion. And their disappointment and disillusionment with Jesus grew as the week went by and he didn't make his "messianic move" against Rome. It was easy for the hosannahs to die in their throats as they screamed out their calls for the crucifixion of this obvious impostor. All this is by way of temptation to Jesus. He could succumb to the wishes of the crowd. They were ripe and ready for revolt. They would follow his commanding leadership—but on their terms. Nevertheless, his clear sense of direction pointed, not to a Davidic throne and a life of ease in Jerusalem, but to Golgotha's Hill and death.

Third, here is the *authority of eternal truth and right*. Again we have the advantage of the perspective of the centuries over that group there in the courtyard conversation. We can see what has happened to the respective interpretations of truth and right as represented by Jesus and the chief priests. One sees what has happened to those who follow Jesus, and by way of contrast, what happened to those who refuse him or fail to follow his way of life.

Jesus said one should seek first the spiritual values inherent in the kingdom of God, and other values will fall in proper order. But so many of us have gone out in search of material goods and financial security only to learn, in times of economic depression or inflation, how transient are these values in contrast to the permanence of the spiritual values of the Master.

Jesus pointed to the way of love and goodwill as the means for peaceful existence in the world. He suggested that those who take to the sword have signed their own death warrant to perish by the sword. Wars and rumors of wars are too close to us to suggest we are not well aware of where the truth is here!

Jesus exemplified love of persons, even one's enemies. And who of us cannot testify as to the evil results that come from harboring hatred for men or nation? Hate destroys the hater more than the hated. Love makes both live in the spirit God intended that his children should live. We call it the Christian spirit because we have found eternal truth and eternal right personified in Jesus and exemplified in his way of life.

Finally, one sees *authority in the divine verification of Jesus as Christ and Savior*. From the Christian perspective of the cross, death, resurrection, ascension, and ever-living presence of Christ, Simon Peter, on the day of Pentecost, preached to a thronging crowd of pilgrims in explanation of what had happened among the people called Christians. He said to these questioners and potential believers, "Let all . . . therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36 R.S.V.) There it is in so many words—the crux of the Christian faith in the authority of Jesus. God has verified his credentials by raising him to a position above all others "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord," as the Apostle Paul put it. (Phil. 2:10-11, R.S.V.)

Centuries of human experience have added their testimony to God's validation of Jesus' authority. His name is above every other. His way of life has been accepted the world around. His transforming experience is still working its miraculous changes in human life and personality.

But out of this conversation there comes a question which each must ask of himself, concerning his acceptance of the authority of Jesus for today's living. Can you accept this authority for your life as the valid voice of God? Have you accepted the friendship of Jesus for your life's companionship? Will you acknowledge before God the gift he has given in and through his son Jesus? These are questions that confront

Mr. Averageman in this year of our Lord. And there is no escape from answering. We can turn away, but we are forced to decide one way or the other.

Shakespeare once put into accurate and picturesque words the secret of widespread response to a leader. In *King Lear* the banished Duke of Kent has returned in disguise to take service with King Lear. The king speaks to him and asks, "Dost thou know me, fellow?" Kent answers, "No, sir; but you have that in your countenance which I would fain call Master." "What's that?" the king asks. Replies Kent, "Authority."⁴

So may it be for us with Jesus, who came clothed in the humanity of man with the authority of God that we might know him and through him know God. There is for us that in his countenance which we would fain call Master!

⁴ Act. I, Scene 4.

To Simon Peter —

ABOUT THE CENTRAL FACT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

6

When Jesus reached the Caesarea-Philippi district he asked his disciples a question. "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

"Well, some say John the Baptist," they told him. "Some say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he said to them. "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You? You are Christ, the Son of the Living God!"

"Simon, son of Jonah, you are a fortunate man indeed!" said Jesus, "for it was not your own nature but my Heavenly Father Who has revealed this truth to you! Now I tell you that you are Peter the rock, and it is on this rock that I am going to found my Church and the gates of Hell will be powerless against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be held bound in Heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be held loosed in Heaven!" Then he impressed on his disciples that they should not tell anyone that he was Christ.

(Matt. 16:13-20)

DECLARATION OF FAITH

In 1898 a teacher asked 1,440 boys and girls to name their heroes and heroines. He reported that 90 per cent chose great figures in history

and distinguished men and women of letters. Washington and Lincoln led the list. Then came Whittier, Columbus, Julius Caesar, and Clara Barton. Fifty years later, L. A. Averill of Worcester State College conducted a similar experiment, and then compared results. Only 33 per cent chose historical characters. But Betty Grable, Shirley Temple, and Jane Powell rated high with those teen-agers. Prime favorites were Jack Benny and Ted Williams. And even Joe Palooka, the comic strip hero, rated well up in the voting. Four times as many boys chose Gene Autry as their ideal as selected Jesus of Nazareth!

Our lives are often shaped by the heroes we worship. A third survey today would doubtless add Roy Rogers, Howdy Doody, Lassie, and Peanuts! But would we rate Jesus any higher in the list than previous generations? Perhaps our problem comes from what a World Council of Churches committee listed as one of the "Axioms of America": "Jesus was a good man. What we need are a lot more people like him. Now take Lincoln . . ."

Do you see what we have done? It isn't that there is no truth in the axiom. Rather, it is that we have kept Jesus on the human level. In a sense we have spiritually damned him with the faint praise of making him only a good man. Is he nothing more?

Karl Heim, the German scholar, expressed our question succinctly when he wrote:

Faith in Christ involves a question: Is he merely a great personality of the past, or is he the living Lord of history who can tell me with full authority what I have to do amid all the complicated problems of the present? Jesus the Lord confronts us all with an Either-Or; we must either commit the whole of our life to him or repudiate him passionately and completely.

This scene in the scripture account of Simon Peter's "Great Confession" involves a significant moment in the life of the Christian faith and fellowship. Here for the first time a man made articulate the

AND JESUS SAID . . .

central fact of the Christian faith. It was here in this moment that man first confessed the Lordship of Christ.

There had been those who had spoken about his Messiahship but never directly in conversation with Jesus. They had hopefully discussed it behind his back. But now the issue is clearly drawn, and they are summoned to give answer one way or the other. So here we raise three further questions about this significant conversation. Why was the question asked? Why was the answer given as it was? And what is your answer to the perennial question of Jesus?

WHY DOES JESUS ASK SUCH A QUESTION?

"Who are people saying I am?" was the introductory part of this conversation. Jesus was aware people were talking about him. He had doubtless heard some of the conjectures and guesses as to his identity. People were always trying to link a modern prophet with one of old. So when the disciples frankly reported some of these identifications, Jesus was probably not surprised. Some thought Jesus was a reincarnation of the prophet Jeremiah. Others likened him to Elijah, the first of the ancient prophetic party of Israel. Still others were haunted by his similarity of message and his relationship to John the Baptist, and they were wondering if possibly John the Baptist had somehow overcome death and had been miraculously restored to life again. They knew of his death, and they knew that his head had been brought into Salome before the King Herod. But it was not unique that they thought perhaps God had resurrected John at this time that Israel might be redeemed.

Nor does it seem odd that Jesus should be interested in what his disciples had heard about him. He was aware of the reaction of the crowds to his ministry. He knew that opposition was being organized. But he was interested in what part of his message was getting through to the people. Did they still think of him as the glorious Davidic messiah who would lead armies to save Israel and defeat the legions

of Rome? Or could they see what he was trying to get them to see—the kind of Messiah God would send to redeem the souls and hearts of Israel?

Jesus had no thought of throwing a conversational straw into the wind to see which way he would trim his preaching sail. He had no thought then or ever to adjust his ministry and his message to popular expectations. Here was no question slipped across in quiet conversation which could constitute an ego-satisfying question of "How am I doing?" Here was simply an effort to learn how far his message was getting across with people and with disciples.

The answer of the disciples confirmed, I think, his observation that people were *watching the miracles and missing the message*. They were missing the fullness of God's rich revelation because they were looking only at the details of the acts and words of God's messenger. They came to Jesus with prejudged ideas of what the Messiah should be like. They checked off each characteristic as they found it and went away saying "He must be the one." But they waited eagerly for him to move in on the opposition and wipe off the pagan sneer from the face of the Roman soldier, who symbolized all that was causing them to suffer. No, Jesus had not gotten across to the people the kind of Messiah God had sent. They were still looking for a zealot who would arouse the passions of a slave people and lead them under some angelic host to victory over the hated oppressor.

So Jesus directs his question to the disciples personally. All right, he said, so much for what other people are saying about me. I am interested right now in what you disciples are thinking. "Who do you say that I am?" I wonder if you sense the dramatic tenseness of that moment. Here for the first time he is asking a direct question concerning his disciples' estimate of him. Their reaction now would indicate once and for all what chance he had to get across the message. If they couldn't understand what he had been saying, what hope that the crowds would get it? If these men were still thinking of any-

AND JESUS SAID . . .

thing less than God's revelation in his Son, then Jesus had a much harder and longer task ahead of him. But he didn't have long to wait for his answer.

Simon Peter, the one who was to be his betrayer in terms of denial, the protesting, affectionate, blustering leader of the disciples, was the first one to speak. Here was no careful coaching. This was no philosophically thought-out form of rational thinking. Nor was it merely the echo of the crowd. This was impulsive, rough, blustering Simon, the fisherman. But he spoke for the disciples when he replied in the words of our text, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus, in a moment of exultation at the confidence which this confession implied, in the effectiveness of the first successful lap of teaching that all had not gone into thin air, speaks graciously to Simon the spokesman and points out that it wasn't flesh and blood that had revealed it. Not just the person of Jesus, nor his earthly manifestation of messiahship, but it was the voice of God speaking through this illiterate fisherman and confirming to Jesus the high mission of his calling. This was the confirmation Jesus sought. Not merely what men thought or even what the disciples thought. But what did God think about it? He looked upon Simon as the vehicle by which God had spoken in confirmation.

The spontaneous recognition by Simon Peter came because *Jesus wished his followers to recognize the truth for themselves*. He might well have laid down the law to them and pointed to the many ways in which he fulfilled prophecy about the Messiah. He might have demanded they accept his messiahship on the authoritarian demands he could impose for discipleship. But here was no "The church says," or "The prophet says," or "I say." But "Who do you say?"

True faith is always a matter of recognition and insight on the part of the faithful. It is never to be found merely on the authority of man or a man-made creed. Consider the factors of your own personal faith. Are not the elements which are effective in your pattern of living

those which have come as a result of your recognition and insight rather than because of a "Thou shalt believe" or "You must accept" on the part of the church or organized religion in any form? Jesus' question is the perennial one for all persons, and its answer is one which you are freely allowed to frame for yourself. If you join Simon in the spontaneity of this conversation, then your faith may well be equal to his.

WHY DOES PETER ANSWER AS HE DID?

Peter's confession is the central faith of the Christian fellowship, and in it we can find the central foundation for the heart of the truth of the church. While there is much good to be found in all wholesome forms of religion, there are some distinctive elements in each one. In the Christian faith, if you would know its distinctive elements, you must be acquainted with Peter's confession of faith. For here is the central faith of our fellowship. Jesus, in some unique way, carried the presence of God in his earthly life and revealed the nature of God to man. Those who looked at Jesus could see God. In some way, inexplicable to many scientific minds, God came alive in the humanity of Jesus and was incarnate—made man to dwell among men. This is the distinctive fact of Christianity, and it emerges in expression for the first time from the lips of this boisterous man of the sea, whose Galilean tongue was the first to carry the distinctive Christian accent. "You are Christ, the son of the living God," said Peter.

But along comes the thoughtful, sincere person who asks respectfully, "Isn't it enough just to believe in God?" And strangely the answer is, "Yes, it is enough—providing you have an understanding of God and a concept of his nature and will which is equal to its revelation in Jesus Christ." In other words, for the Christian, there is the belief that in Jesus we have the highest level of God's revelation. Other prophets and leaders and faiths contribute to the understanding of what God is like. To many of them—Judaism for instance—we in

the Christian fellowship are deeply indebted for the growth and development of the concept of God, as we find it in the prophetic movement of the Old Testament. But for the Christian there is the added belief that in Jesus we have the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, that in Jesus we have the Christ of God, the Messiah, the Savior of mankind. Our Jewish friends accept him as a truly great person in the line of Hebrew prophecy; they see the truth of his ethics and respect his message of love and good will. But they stop short of going with us in seeing him as the culmination of the revelation of God, and we believe it came through him for all people in every age.

There arose at this time Jesus a wise man, if it is right to call him a man. For he was a doer of extraordinary acts, a teacher of men who are glad to receive the truth, and he drew to himself many Jews and many of the Greek race. He was the Christ. And when Pilate at the instance of the foremost men among us had sentenced him to be crucified, those who had first loved him did not cease to do so, for on the third day he appeared to them again, alive since the divine prophets had foretold this and ten thousand other marvels about him. And even now the tribe of Christians named after him is not extinct.¹

But we need to note before leaving this thought that as Emil Brunner says,

We do not have to believe in God and we do not have to believe in Jesus Christ but we believe we can come to God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ the Son.²

In other words, for the Christian, *Christ makes the difference*. Some folks get a warped idea of what the missionary program of the Christian church is, and they want to know what we have in mind, moving into foreign areas and telling them their religion is no good, and,

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*.

² *The Great Invitation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), p. 30.

"Here, take ours; it's the only way to salvation!" There are those who say to me, "I don't believe in any one religion; I believe in all of them." That sounds real pious, but it is a confession of paganism. Such an embracing of religion too often smothers the good of any and leaves the evils of all.

Still the critic has a right to the answer as to what difference Christianity makes in a nation of another organized religion. Take India, where I spent the early years of my boyhood. In three fields alone Christian missions have justified themselves in that nation—education, health, and the status of women. Think what these were before missions and see the progress that has come in large part due to the consecrated efforts of Christian workers. Schools and hospitals now dot the nation—altogether too few to keep up with the disease ravages of an over-populated area. But physical health, sanitation, vaccination, and preventative medicine—these have been weapons of the church of Christ. Women were considered less than slaves, lower than the sacred cattle. But Christian missions, revealing God's way as given us in Christ, have pointed the way to the gradual emancipation of women. There is still a long road to travel, but a road in which Christ is making the difference.

Peter answered Jesus' question as he did because he had come to believe that Jesus was the Christ. He was close to the master as a disciple, and familiarity had only enhanced his estimate of the Messiahship of Jesus. But Peter spoke for more than himself and for more than just the disciples. He spoke for the Christian fellowship then and now in establishing, as a central fact of our faith and the foundation of the central truth of life, that God had come alive in Jesus. God revealed himself and his way of life to mankind through the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?

We cannot long escape this question becoming personal with each

of us. It is one thing to speak in general about Simon's answer and the meaning it has for the church then and now. But here each of us must become very personal and examine his own mind and heart to see what his words are when the question is beamed directly and personally at him, "Who do *you* say that I am?"

Well, we can dismiss the question as being irrelevant and unimportant in our scheme of things. Many persons have done and are doing that right now. But do you see that you have dismissed nothing? Your very indifference is an answer, and you join the group of indifferent skeptics who stand at the edge of the crowd but never get in close enough to the Master to see and hear him, for fear he will look directly into their eyes and ask this question.

Or we can openly reject Jesus as Messiah. There are many who are in this category. Among them are the humanists who believe in goodness and beauty and truth and progress but find in these no place for a belief in God revealed in mankind. Here too are the agnostics who doubt that God exists and who can explain everything to their own satisfaction, at least on the basis of materialism or mechanistic behaviorism. For these man is only human, and there is no divine element in humanity.

The third possibility is, of course, to join Simon Peter there at the beach in Caesarea Philippi when the big question comes through. Here is a question which offers far more than \$64,000 possibilities. And the answer is known to all. One needs no second guessers in an answer booth with him! He has the answer himself. It is not whether he *knows* the answer so much as whether he is willing to *give* the answer which Simon Peter long ago made articulate for all Christians!

When we join Simon and the disciples in that answer, we realize God's gift of a Redeemer. Here is one who can reclaim lives that heretofore have been wasted. Here is a redemptive power we call Christian love which can transform the worst of life into the best. Here is the perennial power of God in human experience which can bring joy to

the dullest life, the assurance of his presence to the lonely heart, an awareness of his power to the faltering weakling, and the intimation of immortality to those who face the transition into the world beyond. All this is involved in your answer to the question of Jesus. Consider carefully what your answer will be. If you can honestly join Simon Peter in a confession of faith, then you will realize for yourself God's gift of a redeemer.

Moreover, your answer will assure you of the realization that the Messiah is truly a *Savior*. Salvation from ourselves and our sins comes with the knowledge of the love of God, which can be known best, Christians believe, in the Messiah of God. In Jesus we have God revealed. In his life we can see the light of life. In his way we can follow the way that leads to God. In his love we can find the secret of the virtues that free us from serfdom to passion and self-centeredness.

Whenever I have visited New York, I have always gone to Rockefeller Center to study those intriguing murals of Frank Brangwyn. They depict the three great periods in man's conquest of the physical world, suggesting the nature of his more tremendous destiny. In the climactic panel one sees a large crowd of people—a cross section of humanity spread over a mountainside. They all look to the figure of Christ, who looms up above them. In the legend at the lower corner of the picture one reads the artist's words of simple faith:

Man's ultimate destiny depends not upon whether he can learn new lessons or make new discoveries and conquests, but on his acceptance of the lesson taught him two thousand years ago.

Who do you say the teacher of that lesson really is? If you rise up with the men of God through the ages you will answer with them, "You are the Christ!"

To Bartimaeus and Legion —

ABOUT THE HEALING POWER OF FAITH

7

¶ Then they came to Jericho, and as he was leaving it accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting in his usual place by the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to call out,

“Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!”

Many of the people told him to keep quiet, but he shouted all the more,

“Son of David have pity on me!”

Jesus stood quite still and said,

“Call him here.”

So they called the blind man, saying,

“It's all right now, come along, he's calling you!”

At this he threw off his coat, jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked him.

“Oh, Master, let me see again!”

“Go on your way then, returned Jesus, “your faith has healed you.”

And he recovered his sight at once and followed Jesus along the road.

(Mark 10:46-52)

They sailed on to the country of the Gerasenes which is on the opposite side of the lake to Galilee. And as Jesus disem-

barked, a man from the town who was possessed by evil spirits met him. He had worn no clothes for a long time and did not live inside a house, but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he let out a howl and fell down in front of him, yelling,

“What have you got to do with me, you Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please, please, don’t torment me.”

For Jesus was commanding the evil spirit to come out of the man. Again and again the evil spirit had taken control of him, and though he was bound with chains and fetters and closely watched, he would snap his bonds and go off into the desert with the devil at his heels. Then Jesus asked him,

“What is your name?”

“Legion!” he replied. For many evil spirits had gone into him, and were now begging Jesus not to order them off to the bottomless pit. It happened that there was a large herd of pigs feeding on the mountain-side, so they implored him to allow them to go into the pigs, and he let them go. And when the evil spirits came out of the man and went into the pigs, the whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and were drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they took to their heels, pouring out the story to the people in the town and countryside. These people came out to see what had happened, and approached Jesus. They found the man, whom the evil spirits had left, sitting down at Jesus’ feet, properly dressed and quite composed, and this frightened them. Those who had seen it told the others how the man with the evil spirits had been cured. And the whole crowd of people from the district surrounding the Gerasenes’ country begged Jesus to go away from them, for they were thoroughly scared. Then he reembarked on the boat and turned back. The man who had had the evil spirits kept begging that he might go with Jesus, but he sent him away with the words,

AND JESUS SAID . . .

"Go back home and tell them all what wonderful things God has done for you."

So the man went away and told the marvellous story of what Jesus had done for him, all over the town.

(Luke 8:26-39)

LIFE THAT IS HEALTHY, WEALTHY AND WISE

Early to bed, early to rise
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

And I suppose many of us have excused our failures in these areas by the fact that we just cannot seem to get going early in the morning, and life jams up with too much to do in the evening to get to bed very early. Sleep is important, and we spend nearly 3,000 hours a year in sleeping. So if you retire at sixty-five to get caught up on your rest, just recall that you already have slept away the fantastic amount of 189,800 hours in your lifetime. To assure health, wealth, and wisdom, something more than sleep is needed.

Jesus' ministry spoke to our needs in this area of life's experience. However, no phase of Jesus' ministry is subject to misinterpretation more than his healing ministry. The modern scientific mind has difficulty grasping completely the meaning of the words in scripture which describe Jesus' ministry of health and wisdom. Too often we argue about the trees of whether or not his miracles occurred and thereby miss the forest of the healthful impact of his healing ministry on the minds and bodies of persons. Few would disagree with the fact that faith is inseparable from healthy-mindedness. And all could agree that religious faith contributes to spiritual health—and emotional and physical health as well. But still we stumble when it comes to understanding this phase of Jesus' ministry.

The conversations recorded in these two passages of scripture tell of Jesus' healing ministry. They are but two of forty-one such accounts

in the Gospel records. Thirty-four of these healing miracles had to do with physical ills. We have chosen for consideration one physical type and one mental type illness with which Jesus dealt in conversation and healing. In both instances the faith of the patient played an important part in the positive results. The words of Jesus to Bartimaeus, who now could see with eyes that had been blinded, come with a special word for us who seek an understanding of the relation of religious faith and maturity of personality and life. Jesus said to him, "Go your way, your faith has made you well."

Faith has something to say and something to do with your life if you are to be healthy, wealthy, and wise in the pattern of Christian personality. What then must one do?

LEARN FROM JESUS HOW FAITH PRODUCES HEALTH

We are witnessing today a nationwide revival of interest in faith healing, reports John Sutherland Bonnell in a magazine article. Newspaper, magazine, radio, and TV brings it into our focus. For example here is a published newspaper advertisement for a television healing program:

Actual miracles happening before your eyes. Cancer, tumors, goiters disappear. Crutches, braces, wheel chairs, stretchers discarded. Crossed eyes straightened. Caught in the healing line as they occurred before thousands of witnesses.

Thousands of hopeful persons flock to the tents of these wandering evangelists who hold out false hopes of healing to the vast majority of them, but whose gross income from their highly organized and profitable business runs from \$500,000 to \$3,000,000 a year. Bonnell comments:

The aftermath of some of these missions has been pitiful. They have left in their wake many disillusioned and despairing people who have found that the temporary improvement produced by emotional excitement did not

last. Undoubtedly, as in all such instances, there were cases of illness improved or cured. So great is the power of faith that it will produce results at times under the most unpromising conditions.¹

The presence of opportunists and charlatans in the ranks of faith healers, along with narrow-gauge minds and spiritually naïve persons who become convinced they have magical powers of healing, make the task of convincing the modern mind of the reality of Jesus' healing ministry even more difficult.

In the conversation of Jesus with the Gerasene demoniac, we have an account which can be understood only when seen against the background of the day in which it occurred. One needs to remember the ancient manner of treating mental and emotionally ill persons. They were cast out of the community. This particular one lived in the graveyard. People shunned him. His kind were looked on as literally demon-possessed. Recall also that even in colonial America, our forefathers shared this belief, even to the extent that in the midst of community hysteria women were burned to death as witches.

Jesus' ministry to this demented soul was one of friendliness and calm assurance. He talked with him as a parent would with a thoroughly frightened child. When the disturbed man had become quiet, there was opportunity for Jesus to bring healing assurance and restore health to a sick mind. Thus he restored possibilities for physical health to a suffering body. But what have you remembered of the story? That the "demons entered into the pigs" who fell off a cliff into the sea and were destroyed? That's all the community could see. And the Chamber of Commerce executive committee came quickly to the graveyard to wait on this healer. They expressed appreciation for his ministry among them. But they pointed out the commercial effect of the loss of this industry—pigs, that is—and invited Jesus to take his ministry elsewhere. We can handle our own problems—meaning this

¹ *The Pulpit*, May, 1957, p. 4.

man of living death who was shunted to the graveyard! The fact that he had been restored to quietness and health and apparently could become a responsible citizen of the community was offset by the financial tragedy which the people naïvely linked directly to Jesus' healing act. After all there were a lot of pigs—and only one man. And he's never been quite bright!

Let us, however, in our day, never lose sight of the fact that for Jesus persons were more important than pigs. And it was through faith that a man had been reborn to the possibilities of healthful living.

Mark's brief account is more explicit concerning the faith element in healing. Here was Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, who rushed headlong into the presence of Jesus and found the saving force for his life. Bartimaeus seemed condemned to his life of sightlessness, as indeed are thousands of persons today. But he believed that Jesus could help him. And Jesus did, the record says. Jesus explained it to him by saying, "Go your way, your faith has made you well." He took no credit for miraculous acts. The faith of the patient was the key factor in his healing. Without that faith no healing could have taken place.

Is that not true today? Granted there are certain bodily disorders that surgery can heal whether or not the patient believes he can be healed. But there must come a cleansing of the mind that is diseased with despair before surgery is complete. And scalpels and sutures are relatively of little importance in this aspect of the case.

It is a mistake, I believe, to differentiate, as so often people do today, between the so-called "divine healing" and medical healing. *I am convinced that all healing is divine healing, for all healing is of God.* Medical science is man's discovery of healing resources in God's world. Physicians are truly God's agents of healing—whether or not they acknowledge the partnership. And I know very few who refuse to acknowledge it. God is not more active in so-called faith healing than he is in any other mode of overcoming illness and disease. All healing is divine healing, and all healing calls for faith.

AND JESUS SAID . . .

The healthy-minded person is the one who has been well-integrated through a life-changing faith. The fellowship of Bartimaeus includes many contemporary scientists who, through faith and research, have conquered disease and given succeeding generations the kind of health that has added twenty years to normal life expectancy in the past century. We have faith to believe that Salk vaccine has made a tremendous difference in the anticipated incidence of poliomyelitis. We have been, or are being, inoculated with that vaccine in the faith that it will make the difference between our contracting the disease and avoiding it. Such faith can transform life. It can do for us, in many different areas of health, what the ministry of the Master did for a blind man outside a city gate twenty centuries ago. He can say to us today, as he did then, "Go your way, your faith has made (or will make) you well."

RELEASE ENERGY THROUGH THE SPIRITUAL POWER OF FAITH

To refer once again to the current revival of interest in faith healing, what makes the situation so confusing and complicated for many Christian people is the fact that these healing evangelists, however mistakenly, are dealing with a spiritual force that is undoubtedly real. Faith, especially if linked with God, releases healing energies that powerfully affect body, mind, and spirit. Bartimaeus and the man known only as Legion could bear witness to this fact after their conversations with Jesus.

We must grant also that some of this development of faith healers has come about in the vacuum which was created on the one hand by the church's refusal to regard as of importance the spiritual aspects of healing, and on the other hand by medical science's concentration on bodily ills with too little regard for the spiritual dynamic. Fortunately, times have changed, and the church and medicine now have a mutual regard and respect for the importance of the other's sharing

in the healing of disease. The doctor and pastor are co-operative workers in ministering to the hurts of body, mind, and soul. What one does affects the other, and what one does is dependent on the other.

Thus a doctor reports to his pastor that a recent case involved some factors which contributed to a restoration of health for which there can be no medical accounting in terms of laboratory and test tube. Creative physical and psychic energy was released into the life of the individual through the power of religious faith. The patient had discovered deeper levels of energy through acknowledging the possibilities of the power of God in his life. And the physician could modestly suggest, "Go your way, your faith has made you well."

Is it not your experience that times have come when you have discovered deep levels of energy, which you did not know existed? You called on spiritual adrenalin, and it brought sudden strength that sustained you in a seemingly supernatural fashion. How many have reported to pastors in hospital rooms and sickbeds, and after convalescence as well, their experience of this kind! They have discovered an energy and through faith have released it into life to find a spiritual power that kept them going, that kept alive their will to live, that kept them calm when nervous excitement could have proved fatal, that sustained them in the hours before surgery, that kept them on a more even keel during those post-operative hours and days. Drugs and pills and hypodermics—all these are essential and helpful at various stages of the game. But there comes the time when we are back on our own resources. Then it is that our spiritual adrenals go to work to help us bridge the gap back to health and power again.

This is precisely what Jesus helped people do in this healing ministry. He brought them life that was healthy, wealthy, and wise. It was healthy in restoring the powers of physical strength and ability. It was wealthy in the sense that it provided resources for living which the person had heretofore not known. It brought wisdom in understanding why one suffered as he did. And this, combination under the

gentle hands of our Lord, is still at work in the minds, emotions, and lives of persons everywhere.

Too many times we miss the deeper meaning of this phase of Jesus' ministry by trying to understand his miracles of healing as dependent on a kind of oriental magic, a spiritual hocus-pocus that opened the door of health to unhealthy people. Remember that these things happened in a day when most medical men were regarded as possessing certain magical powers. How else could a medically primitive mind explain such miraculous happenings? Yet I know of at least two—and doubtless there were others as well—members of my congregation who in recent weeks performed surgical miracles which will restore power and prolong life for citizens of my community. And these particular forms of surgery, in terms of what they did organically for the patients, are easily as miraculous from the standpoint of sheer miracle as either of these healing miracles of Jesus which claim our attention here. Do you have any doubt that they were performed? Speak as I have to the patients involved, and you will have no doubt of the miraculous elements in medical science.

The principle by which the surgeon operates today is the same as the one by which Jesus brought his ministry of healing. That principle is the utilization of the divine power available in God's world. It is divine because it is God-given. It is available to us because God has revealed it in experiment and laboratory to the sensitive, probing mind of a man or woman.

This principle is based on a faith to believe: in the orderliness of God's created world, in the stability of the elements of the world of nature, in the predictability of physical and emotional developments in the human personality, in the combination of pills and faith, surgery and spiritual dynamic as effective aids to healthy living.

Your health depends on your faith. Faith will not restore a lost limb or a removed organ. But faith will enable you to sustain a high level of spiritual dynamic in the face of such loss. Spiritual power comes into

the life that has faith in the assurance that God's care and providence extend to the farthest and the least in the kingdom.

That God's hand moves with the surgeon in the delicate moments of surgery, that his mind speaks to the insight of the psychiatrist, that his voice is heard from the pulpit and at the bedside, that the spiritual power of faith is essential to man's well-being—these are the facts of faith that stem from our understanding of the healing ministry of Jesus.

ACCEPT GOD'S GIFT OF HEALTH AND STRENGTH

One finds much that is true to his own experience in a homely prayer which is to be found on a wall of Chester Cathedral in England:

Give me a good digestion, Lord,
And give me something to digest;
Give me a healthy body, Lord,
With sense to keep it at its best.
Give me a healthy mind, Good Lord,
To keep the good and pure in sight,
Which seeing sin is not appalled,
But finds a way to set it right.

Give me a mind that is not bored,
That does not whimper, whine, nor sigh;
Don't let me worry overmuch
About the fussy thing called "I."
Give me a sense of humor, Lord,
Give me the grace to see a joke,
To get some pleasure out of life,
And pass it on to other folk.

How can we gain this gift of God which brings health and strength?
How can we gain the power that comes into life only through faith?

Many times Bartimaeus, the blind man, must have asked that question. Many times in lucid moments the demon-possessed man in that ancient graveyard must have inquired longingly how he could be restored to himself again. And you in your particular form of physical or emotional need—have you not cried out in the dark night of your soul, “O God, why?” or “O God, how can I overcome this and find strength?” Or have you echoed the words of the Gerasene, “O God, please, please don’t torment me”?

Well, the Christian faith comes along to say that irrespective of your physical ailments or permanent disabilities you may live a life that is healthy, wealthy, and wise. It is found in your faith that God cares for you, and will provide you with sufficient courage and strength to master whatever life may bring. There are three simple steps that will help us all in this direction.

First, *join the Gethsemane fellowship*. Jesus, who saved others, could not save himself from facing the brutal facts of suffering and death rather than compromise. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on that last night just as you and I have prayed, “O Lord, let this cup pass from me.” Who has not asked that suffering be avoided, an impending doom be shunted aside, a seemingly impossible situation changed! But the Gethsemane Fellowship is composed of persons whose faith in God’s divine purpose is so strong that they can say “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” Here is no bowing to the will of some impersonal fate. Here is the acceptance of the pattern and perspective of God on all of life, including my own. Here is belief that God wills only the good in the world, but that forces in an orderly universe often void that primary intention of God’s will with a circumstantial will. This is the will that grows out of circumstances and conditions of the world and the choices which we and others may have made. We need to remember that his final will is always the victory of a greater good than you and I can dream. For Jesus it was a victory achieved only through the cross.

Second, *confess your sins before God in honesty and penitence.* Not all sickness in the world is the result of sin. Not all evil has come because of man's failure. But some sickness and some suffering and some evil are here because of man's selfishness and sin. We need to face ourselves frankly and honestly with the facts of our own failures and responsibility and penitently seek God's promised forgiveness, or health cannot be ours. Gerald Kennedy tells of a wealthy woman who was having considerable trouble because of her feelings of guilt and apprehension. It seems she had defrauded on her income tax return, and was fearful that it might be detected and she would be punished. She reported to her minister that her only consolation was in reading devotional literature sent her by a sect assuring her "peace of mind," and she hadn't found it. Apparently, it hadn't occurred to her to confess her wrong report, make restitution, and then enjoy real peace! Similarly there is no short cut to peace of mind and soul for you if there is aught of sin yet unconfessed and unresolved. God's forgiveness and the healing of his love are astounding and amazing when we honestly face the reality of our situation.

Finally, *pray intelligently, affirmatively, and in full faith to believe that God can and does hear and answer prayer.* Go back again in your mind to that scene where Jesus is passing by and Bartimaeus cries out in the last desperate hope that he will be heard and healed by the Master. "O Master, let me see again!" came the words from the eager lips of the blind man, as he found himself in the presence of Jesus. Here was no bandying of words about whether or not Jesus could do this. It was the simple request of a man who believed that he was in the presence of one who could answer his prayer for sight. Is this not a pattern of prayer for every man?

Dr. Alexis Carrel speaks of prayer as the greatest release of creative energy in the world. In the hour of physical weakness prayer can help restore strength. In the hour of moral temptation faith can keep one morally clean through prayer. In times when despair seems to

AND JESUS SAID . . .

cloud all of life's outlook, prayer can be the means for removing the pall of doom and opening vistas of experience and faith which can enable us to face up to the facts that cause that despair.

Carrel also wrote, "As a physician, I have seen men, after all other therapy had failed, lifted out of disease and melancholy by the serene effort of prayer." Affirmative prayer helps us see that our situation, however dark, is still in God's hands. Thus the situation can be the means by which his control is extended over the hidden areas of life, where he is waiting to bless us.

Prayer is the practice of the presence of God. Jesus revealed that God is love. Wake in the morning and know with faith that his love is actively there with you—whatever your situation. Through the day find frequent reminders that his love surrounds you in all you do. At night commend your life and spirit to God's love and care. Such faith and prayer produces spiritual health; it releases energy through the power of faith, and it helps us accept this gift of God's love—life that is healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Jesus is saying to us today, "Go your way, your faith has made you well." And many of us can "go back home and tell them all what wonderful things God has done for us."

To the Rich Young Ruler —

ABOUT LIFE'S DECISIVE CHOICE

8

¶ Then it happened that a man came up to him and said, "Master, what good thing must I do to secure eternal life?"

"I wonder why you ask me about what is good?" Jesus answered him. "Only One is good. But if you want to enter that life you must keep the commandments."

"Which ones?" he asked.

"*Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,*" replied Jesus.

"I have carefully kept all these," returned the young man. "What is still missing in my life?"

Then Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go now and sell your property and give the money away to the poor—you will have riches in Heaven. Then come and follow me!"

When the young man heard that he turned away crest-fallen, for he was very wealthy.

Then Jesus remarked to his disciples, "Believe me, a rich man will find it very difficult to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I repeat, a camel could more easily squeeze through the eye of a needle than a rich man get into the Kingdom of God!"

The disciples were simply amazed to hear this, and said, "Then who can possibly be saved?"

Jesus looked steadily at them and replied, "Humanly

AND JESUS SAID . . .

speaking it is impossible; but with God anything is possible!"

(Matt. 19:16-26)

SAY YES TO LIFE

If I were asked to select the most fascinating character I have met, there are several persons living and dead who would vie for the honor. But among the fascinating characters of history, who lived before my time, there are few I would rather meet personally than that rich young ruler who came to Jesus to find the secret of effective living. He has always been an attractive person to me. He must have been a most promising person, because it is recorded that Jesus was immediately attracted by him and apparently would have been glad to have him as a disciple.

In a sense, I think, he represents idealistic manhood at its best. Inspired by the example of Jesus, stirred by his teaching, and desirous of sharing something of the joy of Christian life, the young man solicited from Jesus the requirements for those who would follow in his way. He indicates that he was a keeper of the ethical law of Israel, by conviction and practice.

Then Jesus, seeing the block which prevented the young man from realizing the full potential of a highly useful life, suggested that he separate himself from that which occupied the center of his interest, his money and property. Not because he condemned possessions as such, but because property loomed so large in the mind of the youth it would be impossible for him to fulfill his expressed purpose of being like Jesus. Jesus said to him, "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." This he had done and was doing. "Well and good," said Jesus. "If you would be more nearly perfect, go sell all you have and give to the poor, and come, follow me!" Jesus was asking this youth to say yes to Christian life, the stirring fragrance of whose challenge he was breathing in the warm afternoon air.

Rich in this world's goods, the young man was dissatisfied with his spiritual achievements thus far. But not enough dissatisfied to do anything about it. He wanted something more than his life of idealism. Yet he was unwilling to pay the purchase price. He heard the challenge of Jesus, but he couldn't accept it. The barrier was too great. He wanted so desperately to say yes to Jesus' kind of life. And he was so far along in making that decision. But he turned away. Sorrowful, it says, because his great possessions robbed him of the greatest possession which life can offer—the positive value of being truly Christian. What a tragedy when one cannot say yes to life!

A few years ago Clifford Odets' dramatic play, *The Flowering Peach*, was playing on Broadway. In subtle allegory the author told the story of Noah and the Ark. One sees Noah as God called him to build the ark and save two of every kind of animal. He sees the human side of Noah as he accepts the scorn and ridicule of the community for his hare-brained idea that a flood was coming. But nowhere does the observer see Noah as a modern human being more vividly than when he is protesting God's call to build the ark. Noah replies to the Lord, "This is not for me, Lord. Don't ask me to do this! I just haven't got the gizzard for it." And how many of us feel we just "don't have the gizzard" to say yes to life when it demands an answer!

Still, to every person today life comes with its resounding challenge. Christ and his way confront all of us on our path of life, and many see and are inspired by what they see. But when the requirements are laid down for what you desire, can you answer? Or do you turn away? Right now, I want you to put yourself in the place of this young man who faced the big moment in his life. Look into the eyes of Jesus, hear his words of challenge. See what it requires to give a positive, clear answer to life's call.

We must keep life open to spiritual influences. We must center life on the great positive convictions of our faith. We must set life against a supreme standard.

KEEP LIFE OPEN TO SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES

Jesus kept his life constantly open to God and the spiritual influence of his presence. Follow him through the brief days of his ministry, and you will see him constantly turning to God in prayer, as he seeks to know God's will for his life. He said yes to life and discovered that this calls for the constant exposing of life to the dictates of God. Not in the sense of being a slave to some overlord who demands a day's work in servitude, but following the spiritual disciplines that actually will free life from the imposition of other influences which would bog it down.

Jesus lived his life so close to God that their wills literally became identical. Here is a miracle of life that can work in every life which gives positive acceptance to the challenge of Christian life. God's will becomes the ruling force in one's life, and he finds himself doing God's will in daily life. Here is no sense of spiritual drudgery, no sense of spiritual hurry to get the job done, but a sense of divine privilege that life's values pour into one's own life so abundantly. The life that would be rich in this world's values must be kept open to spiritual influences.

Contrast the life of Jesus with the young man there before him. *The rich young man turned his back on life's highest moment.* The person who says yes to life learns early that he must let the highest moments of life command his own life. This the youth was unwilling to do. He caught something of the possible grandeur of life, and for a moment he breathed the rarefied air of high spiritual moments and rich spiritual experience. But then, before he had accustomed himself to this air, he turned away and went down the mountainside, refusing to let his highest moments command him.

Don't we do that? We get onto the edge of something rich and meaningful, and then the price tag catches our eye, and we turn away with the sigh of a wish unfulfilled. The price, within our means every time, seems too high for us to pay, and we turn our backs on that

moment which can determine the attitude and activities for a lifetime.

In such a moment young people find themselves today. Youth especially need to look well at this challenge. Do not answer it if you are unwilling to pay its price. But in turning your back, remember that in a real sense by doing so you slap a mortgage on your soul for the rest of your life. It may seem a very small down payment, but the payments last a lifetime and increase as the years go by, until one day you sink beneath a crushing load of debt you need never to have assumed.

On the other hand here is Jesus with his high-priced challenge. The price may seem fabulous right now. And it is, let none assume otherwise. But here the payments become easier with each passing year, and the dividends are paid to the debtor—of all things!

What I am urging is that youth and adults alike should face today the demand to decide. Here is the rich young ruler who turned his back on his highest moment. And here is Jesus who kept his life open to the spiritual influence of the highest and best moments of life. He identified his will with God's will and thus found the means for paying the tremendous price of Christian discipleship. "If you would enter life, keep the commandments. . . . If you would be perfect, go, sell . . . , give . . . , and come follow me." The choice is yours.

Let me say one thing more about this influence. *Do not be afraid to accept the spiritual influences which life offers you.* There are some who avoid such influence as they would the plague. They look upon acceptance of such spiritual power as being a sign of human weakness, and they would rather cry out with Henley:

I am the master of my fate
I am the captain of my soul.¹

Sheer courage, yes, but foolhardy because it turns its back on the captain of life, whose influence is the one means of achieving mastery

¹ William Ernest Henley, "Invictus."

AND JESUS SAID . . .

in life. You will discover the power for living to the degree you are willing to accept the spiritual influences which God has placed in the world.

We like to think that the Church is one of those influences. Thus I hope you will make your relationship to the Church a vital one; that you will say yes to this phase of life. The Church, as I see it, with its eternal message of the place of God in the life of man, is the one enemy of forces like communism that can successfully defeat them. Cast your lot with the forces of good as represented by the church. Accept the spiritual challenge which calls you to serve. And realize that your education qualifies you and obligates you to represent positively these forces for good and for God in the community.

There is something contagious about buoyant spirituality. When you say yes to God in life, you begin a chain spiritual reaction that fills your life with spiritual atomic power. It radiates down the entire length of your life and throughout the sphere of your influence in the world.

In days when leprosy was rampant in the Eastern World, society's only protection was to isolate the victims. But on those occasions when they had to go near others, they were required to call out "Unclean, Unclean," thus warning others of the danger of being exposed to disease. Let us reverse that, if we will, and suggest that our task is to accept the spiritual influence of God's presence in life, and then as we move among men, there may come the radiation of the power which his influence brings in life. We may not be constantly calling out for all to hear of this influence. But those passing by will be influenced by us and exposed to the dynamic of spiritual influence which causes one gladly to say yes to life!

CENTER LIFE ON THE GREAT POSITIVE CONVICTIONS OF
FAITH

By now you are perfectly aware that I am calling on you to accentuate the positive elements of life and eliminate the negative as-

pects of life through an affirmative acceptance of life's highest and best. Include here the centering of your life and your beliefs on the positive convictions of our faith.

We need the positive conviction that God is. Many people who would be shocked at the suggestion that they are atheists actually live life on the level of atheism. What do I mean? Well, there is the person who avows no belief in God. In fact he says he cannot give intellectual acceptance to the existence of God. Such intellectual atheists are few and far between, and I have yet to find one who is completely and consistently an atheist of this variety. The one who concerns me is the person who affirms a belief in God and then lives as if he didn't exist. This produces some of the most weird spiritual combinations in life. On the one hand you have the person who outwardly lives a life which apparently is based on faith accepted and believed. But one day trouble comes, and he finds he has no invisible means of support. He collapses spiritually. Or the other form of emotional atheism is the person who fails to link his affirmed beliefs with his accepted pattern of ethical behavior. The result is there is a wide divergence between what he says he believes and the way he lives.

You say yes to life when you gain the positive conviction that God does exist in the world, that he is, and that this fact makes a difference in how you are going to conduct your life. Jesus' conversationalist, the rich young man, believed all this. It provided a good foundation. Unfortunately, he never completed the rest of his structure of the Christian life.

We need the positive conviction that God is a vital force in human life. It is one thing to suggest that God exists; it often is quite another to add the words that he is a vital force in our own personal life. And the former is of little actual value unless we add the latter part of the experience. Thus the positive values of Christianity are yours in the proportion that you can go from a mere acceptance of the existence

of God to an acceptance of the presence and power of God in your own life. When you say yes to life, from the Christian standpoint, you are accepting the spiritual influence of God's presence in your life and his challenge to your life. Only in this way does his power become the vital force in your life which it is designed to become.

Which leads us to a third positive conviction: *that in Jesus we have God revealed.* The rich young man apparently believed this. He thought he saw in Jesus the epitome of greatness in life. This must be divine power revealed in human form. So he sought to accept that revelation for his life. But you see, he believed what he could not affirm in his life. And how many lives have been hurled back from the high moment of hearing Christ's challenge just because they couldn't carry conviction into life? They couldn't translate belief into action.

Now, it is precisely at this point that the dynamic of Christian faith goes to work. In Jesus we find the challenge of God, but also in him we find the way of God and the power to live that way. And don't for a moment sell short your ability to move from the realm of spiritual theory into the realm of Christian practice. It could have happened to the rich young man. But he turned away from Jesus—and from life! Revelation comes only when one steps up and says yes to Christ and to life.

We need also to center life on the conviction that the future is worth having faith in. Will you accept that awkward phrasing for an experience that everyone longs for? There is no one today who does not desperately wish for a conviction that there is a future which is worthy of our faith. The day is not easy. The times are tough. No generation faced a more dangerous assignment than this younger generation. But the future belongs to those who believe in it! And our job is to harness our Christian energy to the kind of life and the way of life that will make the future well worth while and worthy of having our faith in—here and now.

SET LIFE AGAINST A SUPREME STANDARD

It makes little difference what realm of life we use; someone could supply us with an ideal person in that area. Those who follow closely the sport pageants can tell you of stars in every field of sports. In the realm of forensics and music others can speak of persons who are, for them, ideals or standards of judgment. A schoolboy seeks to pass like Bobby Layne, to pitch like Warren Spahn, to throw the shot put like Parry O'Brien, or play basketball like Wilt Chamberlin or Bill Russell. And you could carry it on in any other field of endeavor. In the field of preaching I don't mind saying there are two preachers of contemporary time who are the ideals against which I measure my efforts: Harry Emerson Fosdick and Ralph W. Sockman.

So in the realm of spiritual values and religious experience we turn to certain ideals and accept certain standards. If a person is to be judged by the person who is his ideal, the rich young ruler would rate high. He had met many fine people in his day. No doubt people of culture and refinement, persons of fame and fortune were in his circle of friends. But Jesus became the standard by which he judged all of life and all other persons. He confronted his ideal with a question as to how he might achieve a similar success in living. Pity, isn't it, that the young man, desiring so much, went away satisfied with so little! He sets his life against a great and supreme standard. He went away sorrowful because he couldn't say yes to that kind of life!

We need to set our lives against a similar standard today because such a standard gives us a point of reference for effective living. When we seek to practice the principles of Jesus, we find they enable us increasingly to be sharp and concise in our judgments. If we have no standard by which to measure, we may fall short in our choices and our decisions. But when we have something to go by, then we can be certain of what the results will be from our choices. A friend of mine is an amateur airplane pilot. He tells of the experience of being in his first severe storm and how he followed the impulse to go up

through the clouds in an effort to get above them. He says that in the midst of that cloudy soup he couldn't tell whether his wings were on an even keel, whether he was headed up or down. He tells a harrowing tale of suddenly going into a dive, not realizing he was going straight down until he came out from under the clouds a few hundred feet above the ground. With proper instruments he might have known. But with the few instruments of his small plane out of commission he had no point of reference. Ah! there it is, no point of reference! How many lives are wrecked today simply because persons act on the basis of limited judgment. That limitation is caused often by few or no points of reference. Well, in being Christian we have a point of reference; we have a standard against which we can measure our lives and find the basis for clear thinking and valid judgment.

In Jesus is the supreme standard of life which gives us the perspective to see life as it really is. It is so easy to get life messed up when we have a warped or shriveled perspective on life. Today, in your march to maturity accept the standard of this young man of Nazareth, who lived so effectively two thousand years ago, and has been living in the hearts and lives of countless Christians since that time. One finds in Jesus the supreme standard against which we can set our lives to determine our needs.

When you do this, you discover the means for knowing just what life is worth, and more important, what the various things are worth in life and the world. The small child handling his first money does not know the difference between a penny and a silver dollar, so far as monetary value is concerned. Presumably, life teaches him, though some parents wonder how long it takes! But you have some standard by which you judge life's values. The tragedy of many lives is that they have such poor standards of judgment that they make unwise choices and lose many of life's values thereby.

Finally, a positive acceptance of Jesus' life and way as life's standard helps us know what we really want in life. A man was driving down

the middle of the street. A friend chanced to be nearby and called out to him, "You drive that car as if you owned it." He knew that a good many payments were yet to be made before the loan company would give up its ownership of the car, which the part-owner drove with such abandon.

Well, live your life as if you really owned it! But in so doing, be willing to accept the standard of one whose life was lived on the highest level in every experience and whose life can serve as a pattern for every human life. It's your life, but there are still some payments to be made. There is still a part of the purchase price demanded even of educated and cultured Americans!

You are called to accept the high moment when you come face to face with the highest and best in life, as a challenge to say yes to life. "If you would enter life, keep the commandments. . . . If you would be perfect, go, sell . . . , give . . . , and come follow me."

We are all blind, until we see
That in the human plan
Nothing is worth the making if
It does not make the man.

Why build these cities glorious
If man unbuilded goes?
In vain we build the work, unless
The builder also grows.²

² Edwin Markham, "Man-Making," *Poems by Edwin Markham* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 6. Reprinted by permission of Virgil Markham.

To Pilate —

ABOUT ROYALTY AND TRUTH

9

Meanwhile Jesus stood in front of the Governor, who asked him, "Well, you—are you the King of the Jews?"

"Yes, I am," replied Jesus.

While the Chief Priests and elders were making their accusations, he made no reply at all. So Pilate said to him, "Can't you hear the evidence they're bringing against you?" But to the Governor's amazement, Jesus did not answer a single one of their accusations.

Now it was the custom at festival-time for the Governor to release any prisoner whom the people chose. And it happened that at this time there was in prison a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they assembled to make their usual request, Pilate said to them, "Which one do you want me to set free, Barabbas or Jesus called Christ?" For he knew very well that the latter had been handed over to him through sheer malice. And indeed while he was actually sitting in court his wife sent a message to him—"Don't have anything more to do with that good man! I went through agonies dreaming about him last night!" But the Chief Priests and elders persuaded the mob to ask for Barabbas and demanded Jesus' execution. Then the Governor spoke to them, "Which of these two are you asking me to release?"

"Barabbas!" they cried.

"Then what am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?" said Pilate.

"Have him crucified!" they all told him. At this Pilate said, "Why, what is his crime?" But their voices rose to a roar, "Have him crucified!" When Pilate realized that nothing more could be done but that there would soon be a riot, he took a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I take no responsibility for the death of this man. You must see to it yourselves." To this the whole crowd replied, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" Whereupon Pilate released Barabbas for them, but he had Jesus flogged, and handed over for crucifixion.

(Matt. 27:11-26)

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

When you join in the Christian affirmation of faith, which is based on the Apostles' Creed, you include a brief mention of Pilate, which is the only claim to fame on the part of an obscure Roman official in a despised and difficult outpost with headquarters at Caesarea Philippi. Speaking of Jesus we say, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate." And the sole grasp of immortal fame by Rome's procurator in Judea from A.D. 26 to 36 is the infamous miscarriage of justice which he permitted on the day commemorated by Christians as Good Friday.

Our particular interest here is in the conversation between the accused prisoner and the judge, between the Galilean teacher and the Roman governor. To overhear this conversation and to understand its meaning requires the background of its cast of characters, the dramatic events of the trial of Jesus, and the questions which pitiable Pilate so weakly raised. Particularly, the last question is of especial significance to us, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

While Pilate and Jesus are the main performers in this part of the drama, there were apparently scores of others, whose voices are heard

during parts of this conversation at dawn. Annas and Caiaphas, high priest and religious authority of Judaism, had engineered the arrest of Jesus. They badgered him a good bit in the effort to get from him an admission that could be used before Pilate as a charge of treason. Failing in this, they brought in witnesses who testified to Jesus' words and falsely quoted him in chargeable statements. Then they "bound him and led him away and delivered him to Pilate the governor." If they could get Rome to condemn Jesus, then they would have no share in the guilt before the people. They could always put the blame on Rome and share any idea of martyrdom that his followers might attach to Jesus. Then Pilate sends him to Herod, who also is in town for the festival days. Herod had heard much about this teacher who had referred to him as "that old fox." He welcomed this chance to question Jesus. He got nowhere, however, and sent him back to Pilate.

Our main interest is in Pilate the governor, who now finds himself in the unenviable position of deciding on life or death for Jesus. He wanted no part of this. He sought by every way to evade the responsibility thrust upon him. One is reminded of the dilemma of the judge who had to rule a few years ago on the eligibility of Wes Santee, the star miler, whose eligibility to run as an amateur was taken away by the National A. A. U. Even though the regional association of which his school, the University of Kansas, is a member cleared him of the charges, later the national group barred him for life from amateur competition. He went to court and sought and received an injunction against the national group's decision. Thus he was enabled to run again, at least temporarily, as an amateur. But the judge who so ruled was severely criticized by the A. A. U. authorities, as well he would have been from the other side if he had denied the petition. That was Pilate's spot that first Good Friday. He couldn't win for losing. He couldn't find sufficient fault in the prisoner to justify the sentence demanded by the crowd. Yet he couldn't find sufficient courage in his heart to go against the wishes of the mob.

By birth Pilate was a Spaniard. He came from Seville, a city in Spain which enjoyed the right of citizenship. He was born a free citizen in a free city. His father, Marcus Pontius, had distinguished himself as a general under Agrippa and was awarded the pilum or javelin, a Roman decoration for heroic military service. It was to commemorate this medal of valor that the family took the name Pilate. The son, Lucius Pontius Pilate, distinguished himself as a soldier in the German campaigns of Germanicus. After the war he went to Rome seeking political fortune. There he married Claudia, youngest daughter of Julia, the daughter of Augustus Caesar. Claudia's father was a Roman knight. She was reared in the court of Tiberius, who had succeeded Augustus as emperor. Through his marriage, Pilate won the office of procurator of Judea. He took office in A.D. 26. By special permission Claudia was allowed to accompany him.

Pilate seemed insensitive to the demands upon him for taking care to avoid offense to the Jews because of their religious ideas. On several occasions he defied the sacred sentiments of his subjects only to have to recant. These blows to his pride left little room for affection for the Jewish leaders with whom he had constantly to cope. Philo of Alexandria, an ancient historian, quotes the shrewd judgment which Agrippa I passed on Pilate:

"He was cruel by nature and in his hard-heartedness entirely lacking in remorse." The Judea of his day was marked by "bribes, vainglorious and insolent conduct, robbery, oppression, humiliations, men often sent to death untried, and incessant and unmitigated cruelty."¹

Here was a man who was contemptuously proud. He reveled in the freedom which was his by birth and he looked down on any who do not bear such distinction. He had climbed up in the political world by striding on the necks of those in his way. He felt great pride

¹ Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (tr. Herbert Danby, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 163.

in his self-made achievements. He held the Jews in contempt and tolerated their leaders only because they could go over his head and report to Rome any deviations on the part of the governor.

He was superstitiously fearful. He had no religious faith. He believed in himself and in the power of Rome as reflected in Tiberius his emperor. Therefore, superstitious fears crowded into his mind every now and then. When his wife Claudia interrupted his judicial session to send a message of warning concerning her dream about Jesus, he was apparently shaken by the news. He was always fearful something might happen to cause him to lose his job. It did in A.D. 37, and he is heard of no more.

Pilate was cowardly evasive in facing up to his responsibility. He tried in three or four different ways to get out of taking part in making a decision. It is not unlikely that he may have been bribed by Caiaphas to run this trial through in a hurry. Bribery not in money so much as blackmail: "Play ball with us, and we will send good reports to Rome." It must have worked. Pilate was in office for over ten years. But he sought every way possible to get out of this bargain when he saw what he had gotten into.

His ruthless ambition made him strictly the crafty and expedient politician. He watched which way the wind would blow, then he would announce a decision. He must have been impressed with Jesus and his poise in the face of all the confusion. But he had one eye on Rome and the other on the mob. His record was too shaky to take another chance. When the crowd called out that to let Jesus go would make Pilate "no friend of Caesar's," any fight in him was gone. His pride had been threatened, his ambition imperiled. The way of political expediency pointed in the direction of a cross for this Nazarene.

This is the man who held the fate of Jesus in his hand during this conversation. We remember him because of this prisoner. And we remember Pilate in infamy because of his cowardly capitulation to the

demands of a lynch mob who had been bought and brought to call for the crucifixion of this threat to the current leadership of organized Judaism.

THE DRAMA

If we go to the record in John's Gospel, we can find six parts to the judicial hearing which forms the trial of Jesus before Pilate.² First, Pilate was not satisfied with the *charges* which the leaders brought. Boiled down to specifics they were: sedition, disloyalty, and treason. They charged Jesus with perverting the nation and seeking to cause an insurrection. They claimed he forbade people to give tribute to Caesar, a patently false accusation since they had raised that specific question only a few days before. Jesus publicly had given a clear answer, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." His accusers made much of his alleged unauthorized claims to kingship. They falsely imputed to Jesus their own political expectations about the Messiah and wove them into their charges to give them a thread of accuracy in the eyes of a politician who heard the words "claims to be king" as a treasonable threat to Rome.

The second scene in the drama is Pilate's interrogation of Jesus. To say that Pilate was puzzled by this unusual case is to put it mildly. He expected the prisoner to speak out in thundering denunciation of his accusers, protesting his innocence, or declaring his guilt by belaboring the representative of Rome's pagan power. Here is a quiet stranger who only looks at the governor. Pilate becomes uncomfortable in his presence. He begins to feel that judge and prisoner have traded places, and he is being judged by this quiet teacher who seems to know him for the weak, contemptuous opportunist that he is. He asks questions of Jesus, but the answers are hardly satisfactory to Pilate. However, they do reveal that Jesus is being victimized by these chief priests.

² John 18:28-19:16.

He cannot possibly be guilty of the charges they have brought. They must be fearful and envious of Jesus and, therefore, anxious to get rid of him. And they want Pilate to do their dirty work for them.

The third scene is concerned with Pilate's efforts to evade responsibility. He announces that he can find no fault in Jesus. Then he hears the word Galilean mentioned and that reminds him that Herod, King of Galilee, is nearby. So he sends Jesus over to him, but the sly fox sends him right back again. Then Pilate happens on the idea of releasing a prisoner for the feast day, an old traditional custom. He thinks the crowd which sang its hosannas won't let the plotters get by. They will call for the release of Jesus. He is shocked to hear the crowd call for Barabbas and demand that Pilate deliver Jesus to the cross.

The fourth scene shows Pilate in a cowardly attempt to save sending Jesus to the cross by scourging him. This was an effort to pacify the crowd. One sees that in Pilate's action in bringing the beaten prisoner out of the balcony for all to see. Pilate hoped they would take pity on Jesus and hold off on demands for crucifixion. "Behold, the man!" said Pilate, pointing to Jesus in sneering, pitiable contempt. As if to say, "You can't mean that such as this is a threat to Rome!" In this instance both Jesus' life and Pilate's reputation are at stake. Pilate knows now that unless he can get the leaders and their crowd to retract their demands he must accede to them and send an innocent man to the cross. They will not be pacified by the scourging.

Claudia's dream furnishes the basis for the fifth scene. It is reported to Pilate at just the same time that he is beginning to wonder whether or not Jesus might be some kind of supernatural king come on earth. This would not be outside the mind of a Roman of that time who could believe that the emperor was god and that gods were very much like people. It is not unlikely that Pilate and Claudia may have discussed Jesus during the past week. His miracles, the entry into the city, his clash with the religious leaders. The governor's gestapo had kept him informed. Indeed, Pilate's presence in Jerusalem at this time

was simply to be there should anything happen that needed special attention. Festival time was often unruly, and riots gave much trouble to Roman authorities. Could be that one of Claudia's servants was a follower of Jesus, or had been healed by him. There are numerous possibilities of why Jesus should be on the mind of Claudia so that she dreamed concerning "this righteous man." And Pilate, hearing this message at the moment of question about Jesus' kingship, was truly disturbed by his superstitious uncertainty.

The final scene came when the crowd threatened Pilate, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar's." This followed the conversation in which Pilate, in frustration, seeks to get a word out of Jesus by demanding if he is unaware that the governor has the power of life and death over him. He can say the word and let him go, or he can deliver him to the cross. But Jesus points out that all power comes from above. Pilate's power is from Rome—politically above him. Christ's power is from above—spiritual power from God that can resist evil and accept the cross rather than break any compromise. Jesus' courageous calmness is enough to shame Pilate into the last effort to get the crowd to call off the dogs of its demands. "Shall I crucify your King?" he asks. And when they reply adroitly, "We have no king but Caesar!" he accedes to their demands and hands Jesus over to be crucified. But he protests his own innocence in the affairs by ceremonially washing his hands in front of the crowd. Thereby, he plays both ends against the middle. He grants their requests. But he can later explain to Rome, and furnish witnesses to prove it, that he protested his innocence publicly.

Let's give Pilate his due. He was unwillingly on the horns of a dilemma. The demands of the crowd did not jibe with his own sense of justice. Jesus was obviously the victim of trumped-up charges and false witnesses. Pilate's problem was that he was caught between the threat of the leaders who wanted the cross and his recall of the hosannas of the Palm Sunday crowd. These followers of Jesus might get

vocal again if he went against their will. Put a dilemma before a man of Pilate's character, and in the words of the old adage, "The wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the grease." The crowd answered Pilate's question as to what to do with Jesus. So he delivered him over to be crucified.

THE QUESTIONS

One gets insight into this conversation through four questions which the governor asked of the prisoner. His first question was about Jesus rather than to him. "*What has he done?*" He might well have been saying to the crowd, "You come here with these accusations and demand a death penalty. That's pretty serious for a Roman judge. Now get specific. What has he done to get you here and to get me out of bed at this early hour of the morning?" Then they list the charges we have mentioned, and Pilate retires to the courtroom to ask Jesus some questions. After the first round of conversation with the prisoner Pilate returns to state that he can find no guilt in the prisoner that would justify the demand the crowd is making. He finds no evil in him, so he proposes to let him go. Then the accusers start getting specific in their charge of sedition, disloyalty, and treason.

The second question Pilate addresses to Jesus. "Who are you, anyway? *Are you a king?*" And Jesus simply replies, "Are you saying that for yourself or because someone has suggested it to you?" Pilate's reply is a boisterous protestation that he is no Jew. Obviously, the charges have come from Jesus' own people and the chief priests. Jesus tries to suggest the nature of his spiritual kingdom and points out that if he were guilty as they charge, he would have servants fighting for him in the streets. "Are you then a king?" asks Pilate. And Jesus again rephrases the question in his answer to suggest, "If by king you mean one who has been sent of God to bear witness to the truth, then you are quite correct."

"*What is truth?*" is Pilate's next question. It is difficult to interpret

what he meant, unless one knows the inflection of the governor's voice. Did he say it jestingly? Or was it but another expression of his sardonic cynicism? Or was it his own sense of uncertainty bubbling out in quick, involuntary reply to Jesus' statement? Volumes have been written in the effort to analyze what the question implies. Some think Pilate was suggesting that truth is strictly a relative thing, that it changes color with environment, that it is one thing here and an opposite thing over there. But to the Christian Pilate looks like a man who was face to face with the truth and had neither wisdom nor courage enough to know it. For here was the Christ, the master key to life's deepest mysteries—one who said, "I am the truth," one who revealed the truth of God to man. Jesus is answering the basic question of kingship by saying his kingdom is not of this world. He seeks dominion over the minds and souls of men, not by violence, but by the persuasive process of truth finding its way from heart to heart and winning for Jesus willing subjects who seek the truth revealed only in God.

The final question is our main question in modern times. We are still raising that question, each of us. And each of us up to now has answered it one way or another. Pilate said to them, "Then *what shall I do with Jesus* who is called Christ?" And that's your question and mine, as well as the question of Pilate and the crowd on crucifixion day. It is more than a passing question flung into the wind to blow where it will. It is the crux of life's questions for you and me, here and now. What shall *we* do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

Well, we can admire him from a distance with a casual indifference. Not all the crowd wanted his crucifixion. Many were silent who would have saved him if they thought they could. But there were others for whom this was a casual experience to be repeated whenever a threatening voice was raised in challenge to the religious leadership. "If he were the Messiah, he could get himself out of all this. If not, then he obviously was an impostor. He has gambled and lost. Give him credit for

trying; he is more courageous than I am. But don't worry too much about him." Such casual indifference sends him back to the cross again and again in every century. We mark the coming of Good Friday each year because it commemorates for us the hours Jesus was on the cross. But let's face the fact that in a literal sense our indifference puts him back there today.

We can join the lynching mob outside Pilate's judgment hall and reject the Master and cry out for his crucifixion. To oppose his spirit, to throttle his way of life until it is reduced to a mere idling speed incapable of moving against the tide of sin in the world is to promise for ourselves storm and shipwreck on our voyage of days and years. But this we do when we reject his way of life and refuse his friendship.

Or, indeed, we can accept him as Savior and Lord. This is a personal matter. One you cannot discuss out in the crowded yard or even on the balcony overlooking the crowd. You must retire into the privacy of your judgment hall, there to give Christ a hearing in the inner sanctum of your heart. And if you do that with honesty and sincerity, then you will join that increasing throng of those who have named his name above every name, who have accepted the Lordship of Jesus.

There is a legend that after Pilate died by his own hand, his body was thrown into the Rhone River and drifted into Lake Geneva in Switzerland, under the shadow of Mt. Pilatus. The legend holds that every Good Friday his spirit is dragged by demons out of the water and enthroned again, while he still unavailingly washes his hands. It is as if there is no escape from his evasion of responsibility and his refusal to accept Jesus!

But he left a question which we must answer for our lives: What shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ?

To Mary Magdalene —

ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS OF EASTER

10

But on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala arrived at the tomb, very early in the morning, while it was still dark, and noticed that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. At his she ran, found Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put Him." . . .

But Mary stood just outside the tomb, and she was crying. And as she cried, she looked into the tomb and saw two angels in white who sat, one at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had lain.

The angels spoke to her, "Why are you crying?" they asked.

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put Him!" she said.

Then she turned and saw Jesus standing there, without knowing that it was Jesus.

"Why are you crying?" said Jesus to her. "Who are you looking for?"

She, supposing that He was the gardener, said, "Oh, sir, if you have carried Him away, please tell me where you have put Him and I will take Him away."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

At this she turned right round and said to Him, in Aramaic, "Oh! Master!"

AND JESUS SAID . . .

"Nol" said Jesus, "do not hold Me now. I have not yet gone up to the Father. Go and tell My brothers that I am going up to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God."

And Mary of Magdala went off to the disciples, with the news, "I have seen the Lord!" and she told them what He had said to her.

(John 20:1-2, 11-18)

GOOD NEWS

Have you ever been the first member of the family to read the mail which included a letter with unexpected good news? Perhaps it is from a loved one whose serious operation has been successfully performed. Perhaps it is the announcement of a long-desired but not expected visit from parents or children. Perhaps it is a word of greeting from a friend or loved one from whom no word has come for months or years. Any one of these experiences is sufficient to warrant calling out to other members of the family the joyous tidings of good news. And any one of them can give you an inkling of what the good news of Easter dawn meant to Mary Magdalene. Unexpected, joyous, breath-taking, overwhelming, life-giving—these all are needed as words of description for that dramatic moment when the risen Jesus spoke to the disheartened Mary Magdalene in such a way that she knew who he was.

Mary had come to the garden where the tomb containing the body of Jesus was to be found. The arrangements had been hurriedly cared for on Friday after his death on the cross. Now she comes on the first day of the week, even before darkness had fled, to keep watch by the tomb of her friend. This was one who had shown her a new way of life and lifted her from the depths of gutter living to the heights of Christian blessedness. Picture her astonishment to find the tomb empty with the stone moved away and the seal of Rome broken. She ran to fetch the disciples, and soon Peter and John were racing headlong

toward the tomb. When they were satisfied that Mary was correct, they simply returned home.

Mary remained at the tomb. It is at this moment that our conversation takes place. She had heard from the angelic messengers in the tomb, who inquired as to the cause of her weeping. Then she turned around and there was Jesus. But she did not recognize him and assumed he was the gardener. She asked if he had removed the body. Jesus answered simply by calling her name. Immediately she knew it was Jesus and replied in joyous affection, "My master." He instructed her to report to his disciples that he was risen and would be ascending to the Father. "And Mary of Magdala went off to the disciples with the news, 'I have seen the Lord.'" There is the Easter good news. She had seen the risen Lord. She had come face to face with the fact of the resurrection early on resurrection morning. She became the first to greet the victorious conqueror of death. Now she runs gaily and joyfully to report her good news.

WE CAN BELIEVE THAT GOD HAS THE LAST WORD

Easter dawn brings hope to shattered hearts and a divine assurance to doubting human minds that God has not abdicated, that evil has not gained the victory. Here came Mary, worn by the emotional tug-and-haul through which her grief-stricken week-end had brought her. The tears were still streaming from swollen eyes as she broke the silence of the early dawn. She crossed the valley of Kedron and climbed the gentle slope to the place where they had laid him. Few were about at that hour of the morning. Asleep was Pilate who had delivered him over for crucifixion. Asleep was Caiaphas who had plotted his death. Asleep was Herod after nights of festive revelry. The soldiers had long since abandoned their post at the cross and the tomb. The pilgrims in town for the high holidays were greeting the dawn deep in sleep.

But here was Mary, rushing toward the tomb wherein lay the body of the one she loved more than life itself. Indeed, he had given her

AND JESUS SAID . . .

a whole new lease on life. Her proposed deathwatch became a discovery of life. For the stone was rolled away, and it became the symbol of the faith that God has always the last word. Rome had sealed the tomb. But evil had not sealed the doom of the Christian faith and life. They had wrapped a dead prophet in grave clothes, but a risen Lord had left them there as symbols of his temporary occupancy of this place of death. Mary was looking for a dead Christ and never found him. She didn't recognize him when she saw him there outside the tomb. She came to the tomb believing that evil and death had conquered. Jesus was dead. His way of life had been stymied by the successful, scheming intrigue of the religious and political leaders. Then she heard the Master call her name! All the bells in Jerusalem could not sound fully the joy in her heart as her shattered hope and broken heart swung back into place. For God had the last word.

Christians since that day have shared this faith to believe that Jesus did call her name that day outside the empty tomb. The resonance of his voice echoed from the hollow emptiness of the borrowed tomb. And life begins all over again for mankind. This is not to say that there is no evil in the world, no death to confront us. Some of us are too close to recent heartbreaks to pass by its reality with nothing more than a pious sigh. Disaster strikes again and again, and its terrible toll is real to all involved. Evil is obvious on every hand. To deny its existence is to beg the question of its activity in life and society. But to see that evil and to know that it does not have the final triumph, to match the brutal facts of the immediate world in which we live with the brilliant faith born on Easter morning in the heart of a Mary Magdalene is to know

That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.

This is the good news which Mary carried on the wings of the morning: "I have seen the Lord."

That statement of fact and faith is enough to convince the Christian that God holds the future in his hand, that his universe is friendly, and that he speaks to and dwells with man forevermore. If that sounds like a big order, recall that we are talking about a once and for all victory over the forces of death and evil. If we had nothing but this conversation to go on, we could still accept the fact that God had the last word in this conflict. The gaping entrance to the empty tomb, the stone removed from the entrance, the seal of powerful Rome split in two—these are the evidences that the Creator of the universe holds the future in his hand. For awhile it had looked as if he had abdicated. Pagan Rome was calling the turns. The Son on whom the revelation of God's nature and way were dependent lay lifeless in a tomb, victim of evil, pagan, godless forces. Either God didn't care, or he hadn't the power to do anything about the events of the past three days.

But there comes Mary Magdalene, racing with the morning, to spread the good news that Jesus has risen, that all is not lost, that the kind of God Jesus talked about and prayed to and died for was indeed the God who could be an indwelling presence in the human heart. His is a friendly universe. His is the last word. His is the victory over death. That's good news for all of us.

WE CAN KNOW THAT LIFE IS ETERNAL NOW

What a difference the coming of Easter morning, with its resurrection, makes in the life of humankind. The shadow of the cross disappears in the glow of the new dawn. As one has put it:

Christ has taken the cross and, using it as a battering-ram, has driven the end out of the sepulcher to let in the light of an eternal day.¹

We can know that life is eternal here and now, for each of us.

Mary Magdalene found this out. Here was a tragic figure. She had

¹ Charles B. Templeton, *Life Looks Up* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p. 186.

wasted so much of her life in a sordid existence. One day she met Jesus, and her life was changed. She saw how shabby her days had been, because now she saw how bright they could become. Jesus had done so much for her, but as she carried her aching and broken heart into the garden that morning, the world seemed to have tumbled back in upon her. Then by the dawn's early light she makes a discovery. She learns that life in Christ has a new dimension, an eternal quality which is to be hers as well. The story was incomplete until she held her brief but joyous conversation with Jesus.

This conversation records the human discovery of the empty cross. The tomb was empty to signify Christ's triumph over death. Now the empty cross took on the rich symbolism of the triumph of his way of love over the ways of human greed and selfishness and sin. As one enters the harbor of Gothanburg, Sweden, he sees the Mariner's Memorial. Highest structure on the harbor level, this brick tower stretches up to the sky in memory of Swedish sailors who went out but did not return from the sea. Atop the tower is the figure of a woman looking vainly out to sea for the return of her husband or brother or son. As I looked at this symbol of hopes shattered and fears confirmed, it occurred to me that this was a poor symbol to be dominating the skyline of this seaport. Then I lifted my eyes to the hills surrounding the harbor, on which the city is built. Dominating that sky line, and actually reaching higher into the sky than the Mariner's Memorial, is the tower of a Lutheran Church. On top of it was the cross, gleaming into the sun of that summer day. The symbol of Christian hope is highest in the Swedish sky and brings assurance of this good news which Mary Magdalene found in her discovery of one who had returned to life and Lordship from apparent death and defeat.

Here is a message that says human life may have within it the shining glory of the presence of God. If human life is of eternal quality, then it can entertain the presence of the Father of life, who gives to it an accent of eternity. Jesus revealed in his life and death and in

his resurrection that the divine quality of life can find expression in combination with the human elements of personality. His was the perfect example of the divine dwelling in the human. He pointed to the fact that every commonplace experience of life may receive the light of eternity. So a Mary of Magdala, she of the scarlet past, who had drifted far from the Father's house, who was beyond the pale of man's concept of redemption, through Christ could find in her stained life the purity of the divine presence of God. He claimed her for the Father as one redeemed and restored to the household of the faithful. This is a tremendous gospel, if we can but accept its meaning for our own beleaguered lives. The shining glory of the presence of God can be radiant in your personality, if you move toward the Easter dawn and hear the good news.

Mary Magdalene learned from the conqueror himself that there is life after death. She had been on hand through all the bitter tragedy of that fateful Friday. She had agonized through the hours of the crucifixion. She had been there to give tender assistance to the burial of the body of her Master. She had felt the chill of death, seen the finality of the rock rolled in place before the tomb, and the presence of the soldiers stationed there to guard the tomb. Now on this morning she hears him call her name; this one who had died and now lives again.

We can learn from this conversation and this experience the answer to our questions about life after death. Indeed, here is our only satisfactory answer. There are others, but they are not satisfying. For instance there is the answer of materialism, which looks on the tangible as the only reality. The body returns "dust to dust and ashes to ashes," and for the materialist that is about all there is; there isn't any more. Science is silent when we raise this question with it. None but Christ has returned. That fact we must take on faith, not on experimentation or the application of the scientific method. Here, too, the agnostic leaves us dangling. He answers that he doesn't know and probably means in most instances that he thinks you cannot know either. As

a matter of fact he will go on to suggest that we will never know, so there is no point in concerning ourselves about the question. But Jesus goes straight to the point when he announces, "I am the resurrection and the life. . . . Because I live you shall live also. . . . I go to prepare a place for you with the Father—that where I am there you may be also." Here from the Master of men is confirmation of man's hope and desire for life to come. Here in the Garden conversation there is immediate assurance given Mary and through her to the other disciples that Christ is alive, that there is life after death, that

Up from the grave he arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a Victor from death's dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.

The biographer of R. W. Dale, famous nineteenth-century preacher in Birmingham, England, tells that after Dale was well along in years and already an outstanding preacher, he was writing an Easter sermon when the thought of the risen Lord broke in upon him as it never had before. The preacher testified,

"Christ is alive," I said to myself; "alive!" and then I paused;—alive! and then I paused again; alive! Can that really be true? living as really as I myself am? I got up and walked about repeating, "Christ is living! Christ is living!" . . . It was to me a new discovery. I thought that all along I had believed it; but not until that moment did I feel sure about it. I then said, "My people shall know it; I shall preach about it again and again until they believe it as I do now."²

WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOD'S REDEEMING LOVE

Mary Magdalene loved Jesus with a loyal devotion. She, who had known the passing love of so many, and who herself along the way

² A. W. W. Dale, *Life of R. W. Dale* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1898), p. 642.
118

had loved well but not wisely, now came to grips with a new kind of love. No mere erotic romanticism this. No effervescent sentimentalism either. Here was a deep abiding affection of a truly spiritual nature that summoned forth in purity all the loyalty for high ideals she could muster with God's help. She knew what a later writer would sing,

Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

So she was prepared through her friendship with Jesus for the transforming experience that was hers when Jesus called her name that Easter morning in a garden.

Easter, with its victorious message and joyous meaning, did not come to just anyone, nor does it come to just anyone today. It *can* come to anyone provided he possesses a prepared heart which has been sensitized to God through Christ. The loyal and loving devotion of Mary Magdalene had led her into an experience which had transformed her character from a woman of the streets to a follower of the way of Christ. Now in the garden outside the tomb she talks with her Lord and finds a whole new world opened to her because of his victory over death. See what happened to her and to the other followers of Jesus when the impact of his resurrection penetrated their clouded vision and smote the depths of their grief!

Here we see deep sorrow turned into inexpressible joy. She cannot restrain herself. Adrenal glands now flood her system with strength she didn't have before, in her state of emotional exhaustion, and she runs again to tell the disciples the good news. Halford Luccock says the first Easter began with a series of foot races. First, Mary runs to tell the disciples of the empty tomb. Then Peter and John race to the garden. And now Mary, having met the risen Lord, having conversed with him briefly, literally runs like the wind to tell them the good news. A sorrow so deep and so great that it seemed impossible to com-

fort it is replaced here with a joy which almost bursts inside her, so inexpressibly happy does it make her. "I have seen the Lord!"

Abject despair is changed to a living hope by that Easter dawn discovery. They thought it was he who would redeem Israel—and them. Friday he is dead and gone. They have seen the lifeless body placed in the cold finality of the tomb. And as if in adding formal insult to tragic injury, Rome slaps an official seal on the tomb to keep it final. The disciples scatter to their homes. Even the faithful follower from Magdala, keeping her pre-dawn vigil at the tomb, is looking for a dead Christ. The disciples come and accept the fact of the empty tomb with no thought that it means any more than a final disappearance of this bearer of their hope. In despair they make ready to return to fish nets and tent canvas. But discouragement is turned to hope when Jesus' voice rings out in the cool clear dawn of the morning, "All hail."

Easter marks the transformation of humiliating defeat into glorious victory. The cross was total defeat it seemed. Caiaphas went home fully satisfied they would hear no more from this threat from Nazareth. "Too bad we had to be so extreme, but people have short memories." True that is, Caiaphas, but they remember you because of what happened to Jesus! And you, the victor, were defeated that Easter dawn. Pity that you slept on, never knowing what had happened! But the Apostle Paul later could call attention to these events and sum them up with a call to thanksgiving to God because "death is swallowed up in victory." The sting of death and the victory of the grave were gone forevermore because the man outside the tomb that day was not the gardener, as Mary supposed, but Jesus who called her by name.

Here too one finds human weakness transformed by the spiritual dynamic of a newborn faith. Human weakness scattered the disciples at the crucial moment when their leader went on trial. Lack of spiritual stamina caused Simon Peter to deny his relationship to Jesus while Jesus was being harassed by Herod's court followers. Grief and sorrow had stunned the senses of Mary and the other women around the

cross. But came the dawn on Easter, and weakness was made strong through the transforming power of God as revealed in a risen Lord. And they became witnesses to the resurrection and to what the power of God can do in the human heart.

Charles Bradlaugh, an avowed infidel who stirred London more than a generation ago with his attack on the Christian faith, once challenged Hugh Price Hughes, a Methodist preacher who was head of a West End London Mission, to debate the truth of the Christian faith. The preacher accepted readily with one condition. He would bring with him to the debate one hundred men and women who would be witnesses of the redeeming love of God and what it can do in the human heart. They would give evidence and could be cross-examined. They would be persons reclaimed for Christ from the vices of sin and intemperance. They would be folks who were walking in newness of life from homes of poverty, greed, and sin. They would be witnesses of the transforming power of God in Christ. But Hughes asked that his challenger bring a group of persons who had been similarly helped by the gospel of infidelity. Needless to say, the debate never came off. The preacher was there with his hundred transformed persons, but Bradlaugh never showed up. And the meeting turned into a testimony time, as redeemed persons bore witness to the power of God in their lives through Christ.

Mary Magdalene could have been in that group in her day. She met Jesus in the morning outside the tomb, and her life was changed. You can meet him on Easter morning, and your life can be transformed. He calls your name. Answer that call, and you can bear your witness, "I too have seen the Lord."

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On the Emmaus Road —

ABOUT THE MIRACLE OF RESURRECTION

11

¶ Then on the same day we find two of them going off to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they went they were deep in conversation about everything that had happened. While they were absorbed in their serious talk and discussion, Jesus Himself approached and walked along with them, but something prevented them from recognizing Him. Then He spoke to them,

“What is all this discussion that you are having on your walk?”

They stopped, their faces drawn with misery, and the one called Cleopas replied,

“You must be the only stranger in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard all the things that have happened there recently!”

“What things?” asked Jesus.

“Oh, all about Jesus, from Nazareth. There was a man—a prophet strong in what he did and what he said, in God’s eyes as well as the people’s. Haven’t you heard how our Chief Priests and rulers handed him over for execution, and had him crucified? But we were hoping he was the one who was to come and set Israel free . . .

“Yes, and as if that were not enough, it’s getting on for three days since all this happened; and some of our women-folk have shocked us deeply. They went to the tomb at dawn, and then when they couldn’t find his body they said that they had had a vision of angels who said that he was

alive. Some of our people went straight off to the tomb and found things just as the women had described them—but they didn't see *him!*"

Then He Himself spoke to them,

"Aren't you being stupid, and slow to believe in all the things the prophets have said? Was it not inevitable that Christ should suffer like that and so find His glory?"

Then, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them everything in the Scriptures that referred to Himself.

They were by now approaching the village to which they were going. He gave the impression that He meant to go on further, but they stopped Him with the words,

"Do stay with us. It is nearly evening and soon the day will be over."

So He went indoors to stay with them. *Then it happened!* While He was sitting at table with them He took the loaf, gave thanks, broke it and passed it to them. Their eyes opened wide and *they knew Him!* But He vanished even while they stared at Him. Then they said to each other,

"Wasn't your heart glowing while He was with us on the road, and when He made the Scriptures so plain to us?"

(Luke 24:13-33)

ROAD OF THE BURNING HEART

Some years ago there was a motion picture which sought to personalize conscience in the form of a man who was an uninvited passenger on a lifeboat which contained a variety of persons who had been thrown together by the whim of fate. The title of the picture was *Strange Cargo*, and the action revolved around the influence of this quiet stranger who seemed to make people realize how bad they were. But at the same time he made them act from honest and high motives in a series of difficult decisions. None knew whence he came, and when

AND JESUS SAID . . .

rescue had been effected for the drifting victims, they found that the stranger had quietly disappeared from sight.

Something like that happened that first Easter Sunday afternoon when two crestfallen followers of Jesus were walking the weary way back home again. In despair they had witnessed the events of the past three days. They had seen their leader arrested, tried, crucified, dead, and buried. All was lost, and now they were making that desolate and difficult journey back to the status quo in which Jesus had found them and from which they thought he had come to save them. The finality of death hung as a pall over them as they walked in sorrowing pilgrimage. Then, all of a sudden, they became aware of a stranger who had joined them. Perhaps he had caught up with them, and they had failed to notice his arrival, so immersed were they in their self-pity.

George Eliot called this the most beautiful story in all literature. As such it is worthy of literary interest. But the story has much more value than that for us. The Emmaus Road is relevant to your life and mine today. The conversation which is recorded from this early experience is important to us for revealing what happens in the lives of those who walk the road of the burning heart. They find their eyes opened to a risen and living Lord, who meets each pilgrim personally along the way.

As we listen in on this conversation, note what one finds in a pilgrimage along this road. Here is seen the revealing talk of the Master, the reassuring companionship of the risen Lord, and his redeeming touch on our lives. If we walked this road, we could also bear witness as did these early companions. We could say with them, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

THE MASTER'S TALK—REVEALING

The scene is set forty-eight hours after the crucifixion. Cleopas and his companion are walking the seven miles from Jerusalem northwest

to the village of Emmaus, where evidently they had residence. Tradition has it that the village referred to here is now called El Kubeibeh. However, there are three other villages of the name Emmaus. At any rate it was a journey of several hours on foot. And the distance seemed even further to those discouraged and despairing disciples. Tradition has named the companion of Cleopas Simon. Leslie Weatherhead suggests that the other person may well have been the wife of Cleopas. There is much to be said for the idea, and it is one which we sentimentally might like to accept, since it means that Jesus was a guest of this couple that first Sunday evening at supper.

Certainly there can be little question of the basis of the conversation between the two dejected followers of a crucified Jesus. They were talking of the failure of his mission. They were sympathizing with each other over the loss of their leader. Their conversational post mortems included a good many, "Do you recall when he said so and so?" And "if he had only said this, or if he had just waited there, or hurried up here, or not said that." And so on the conversation goes, second-guessing the tragic events that had transpired. A recent excursion into the autobiography of Knute Rockne brings to mind the experiences of replaying a football game on the way home. "If we had blocked that fellow, or if we had called play so and so, or one step more and I would have tackled him." You can fill in the rest. And in doing so, you will get something of what must have been the type of conversation before Jesus joined the two trudging, sad-hearted disciples. Now that Jesus was dead, they were taking the long road back to the status quo because they had nowhere else to go.

"What now?" was the question at which they dared only nibble as they talked. *They were to have been apostles—sent with a message.* But now who was to send them, and what now was to be the message? A dead Christ could not send apostles, and there was no message for them to bring now that the dark and final shadow of the cross fell on all they said and did. They had not believed the report of the

woman at the tomb. Surely, the tomb was empty. But that said nothing to them of his being alive again—just the hallucinations of a tearful, sorrowing woman who wanted so hopefully and desperately to believe that Jesus was still alive.

In the midst of such a conversation Jesus joins Cleopas and his companion. He sees the sadness of their ignorance and unbelief. Their outlook on tomorrow is dark. Their hopes have been completely disillusioned. And they resent the apparent ignorance of their uninvited fellow traveler, who doesn't seem to know that anything has happened. He asks the simplest questions that try their patience. "You must be the only person around here who hasn't heard what has happened!" How those words must have haunted them later as they realized the full impact of the identity of their new friend. Did anyone know better these things that had happened, which had thrown them into such an emotional and spiritual tailspin?

His identity still unknown to them, the stranger of Galilee chides them graciously for their spiritual dullness of insight and their failure to recall all the words of their Lord. Indeed, he tries to suggest the necessity for the cross. Think a moment how that would be received by faithful disciples. How could anyone say it was fitting that their leader should be the victim of a judicial murder? How could their reeling minds comprehend that it should be necessary for one so good to suffer so bad a fate, one so pure to receive so vile a punishment!

And then comes the spiritual insight of the perspective of the scriptures. There is plenty of time on that long walk for Jesus to begin back with Moses and carry the revelation of God down through the prophets and into the new covenant with the coming of Jesus. They were so fascinated with this revelation that the time sped by as did the miles.

Before Jesus had completed his discourse, they were at the front gate of the Emmaus cottage where Cleopas lived. It was not mere oriental courtesy that called for an invitation to their companion to tarry with

them for supper and the night. They could not let him go until he had finished the marvelous message he was sharing with them. And he didn't leave until not only their hearts and minds were opened, but their eyes as well. He opened the scriptures to them and then opened their eyes to the fulfillment of scripture as they sat down with him at the table. Guest became host as he took the bread and broke it. In this simple gesture of Christian fellowship the eyes of the sorrowing disciples were filled with the joy of recognition. They now knew who he was. This stranger was their Savior. This man not only had the perspective of scripture, but he put the cross in the Christian perspective of Easter. Post-mortem had become post-resurrection for these who heard the Master's talk and were blessed with the revealing conversation of a risen Lord.

THE MASTER'S COMPANIONSHIP—REASSURING

Into a shapeless void of disillusionment and despair, which had engulfed Cleopas and all the disciples that first day of the week, the conversation of Jesus came to bring a scheme, a rhyme and reason, a pattern in which the events and happenings of the past few days and months could be seen in the Christian perspective. What it meant to them was later recorded by Luke in these words of scripture. Forever afterward Cleopas was known as one who had walked with Jesus the road of the burning heart. I daresay he never tired recalling that marvelous, life-changing experience, when the reassuring companionship of a walking stranger produced the confident belief and faith in the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord. "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

They needed reassurance, these despairing followers who had turned back to former things. Was this experience of fellowship with Jesus just to be a pleasant, though disturbing, memory? Years would come and go and time would heal the wounds of their sorrow and grief.

AND JESUS SAID . . .

But what of that desperate and haunting hope which they poured out to the stranger on the Emmaus Road, "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel"? Could that ever be dimmed in their minds? Could they ever rid themselves of a sense of guilt for deserting him in the crucial hours? Could they ever stop wringing their hands and saying, "If only I had done this or that, maybe things would have been different." The past seemed sealed in a doom-like capsule of elapsed time. The tomb was empty. But the Christ was dead.

Against this kind of mind-set, in this mental framework of reference, they listen eagerly to Jesus. They are reluctant to release him from their presence. Perhaps even now they had a fleeting fancy that this might, through some miracle, be he.

"But, oh no, Cleopas, don't torture yourself with that thought. You saw the body. You saw the tomb. You saw the seal of Rome. Accept this ministry of comfort which helps explain the why of it. But don't let your mind leave the confines of logic and reality. Regard the presence of the stranger as providential, if you wish. He happened by at just the right moment. His words have calmed your troubled spirit. His companionship has eased the loneliness. His logic and his scriptural knowledge have helped in seeing that it wasn't all so purposeless as it seemed to be. Maybe there are some loose ends of the pattern which can be still put into place and the fellowship go on."

So here they were with opened minds and opened hearts because of the reassuring companionship and the revealing words of Jesus. Now at the table they experience the eye-opening experience of seeing that their companion really is Jesus. None other breaks bread in that fashion. None other offers thanks in that manner. None other bears the marks on his hands. This is Jesus! He is risen! All this talk was more than merely passing the time. Here is a ministry of reassurance from a risen Savior.

The certainty of faith which they had known as they heard him teach, as they followed him along the roads of Galilee and also along

the way of Christian faith, now was reborn in their sorrowing hearts. They were no longer alone. Jesus was with them. The future was no longer darkening; the bright light of God's revelation had swung its searchlight on them. The despair that had moved in upon them like a lowering fog on Friday now was lifting as they beheld the glory of the resurrection on the evening of the first day of the week. Here was no dead Christ but a risen Savior!

Victims of as deep an emotional depression as man has ever experienced now found themselves shocked into the reality of religious faith, never again to return to those haunting moments of self-debasement and anxiety. The heart-warming experience on the road to Emmaus brought the reassurance of a continuing companionship of the Master. "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

THE MASTER'S TOUCH—REDEEMING

Once that certainty had returned to their hearts, they no longer needed the physical presence of Jesus. And he was gone. Picture now what happens in a life which meets the Master and comes to know the revelation and reassurance which leads to redemption. This record is an accurate account from the psychological, the physical, or the spiritual standpoint.

Cleopas and his companion have just finished a seven-mile walk, on top of an eight-hour period which has included little if any sleep, and which has thrust them into the depths of emotional exhaustion and physical tiredness. But, unhesitatingly, they leave the house and start back that seven-mile trek to Jerusalem to tell the disciples what they have heard and seen and experienced. It is nighttime and therefore dangerous to be out, for fear of robbers who lurked along the way. But these two give no thought to danger. They have thoughts only of the transforming experience which has been theirs during the last few hours.

See the contrast in conversations on that Emmaus Road, going and coming. We have the record of what they talked about on the way home to Emmaus. We need no record to know what they talked of as they raced along in an impossible seven-mile dash to tell the disciples that despair was over, darkness ended, death vanquished. They doubtless said over and over again the words they heard Jesus speak. "Do you remember here by the olive tree he was saying this. . . . Yes and over there by that hill he started telling us about . . ." So on they go and on they talk of the joy which has changed them from despairing, lonely souls of self-pity to rejoicing and eager apostles of the resurrection good news.

Let there be no doubt that the Emmaus Road is still open to us! Jesus still walks that road as companion to all who pilgrimage there in faith. He still touches life with the miracle of resurrection and brings alive hopes that have died. He makes real those illusions that have brought despair. He redeems life for those who have given up. Jesus is still alive and available. If he weren't, then the story we are reading here would be but a beautiful addition to Grimm's Fairy Tales, and nothing more. But it is much more. It is the story of what happens in the lives of those who walk the road of the burning heart. Here are men made into messengers. Here are gloomy bearers of ill tidings transformed into apostles of good news. Here the despairing are filled with hope. All because there is a companion along the way who can change life, redeem it, and send it out to bear witness to the transforming power of the resurrection.

There is little interest in this account if it is only story. You have only a passing interest unless it speaks to your condition. Unless perchance you could relive its actual experience for yourself! And there's the dynamic of the Christian gospel. It says that we today can join Cleopas and the millions of others who have known Christ as the risen Lord, who have walked and talked with him along the way of life and

have emerged from their journey redeemed in body and spirit through God's grace and love revealed in Jesus.

For Christ can and does walk the way of life with you and me today. From his contagious spirit of faith and love we take renewed devotion to the tasks of life. We find when the wave of joy is at the crest that Jesus shares our happiness with us. We learn when we walk the valley of shadow that leads through the glen of gloom, we need have no fear, for he walks with us, his rod and his staff sustain us and strengthen us.

Or when we are prone to wander from the way and leave the straight and narrow path of purity of motive and act, he gently but firmly challenges our waywardness and calls us again back into the fellowship of the faithful. He is there whenever we claim his companionship. His touch is the Master's touch that transforms the dull monotonous trudging on the road, back to the old status quo, into the highway that leads us marching eagerly forward to joy in Christian living.

Leslie Weatherhead suggests a contrast between this Christian claim and that of the spiritualist who believes that in certain circumstances, with the help of a medium, we may make contact with the dead. The Christian claim is that anyone, without the necessity of a medium, may daily live in the friendship of the risen Lord, the living Christ, and through him find life filled with new purpose, new beauty, and new meaning.¹

On May 24, 1738, a clergyman of the Church of England, who for months and years of spiritual searching had been desperately anxious to find a satisfying religious experience, worshiped in the vespers at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Then he went, somewhat unwillingly, with a friend to the regular meeting of a religious society on an evening that changed his life and yours. Listen to these words of John Wesley,

¹ Leslie Weatherhead, *Personalities of The Passion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1943), p. 181.

AND JESUS SAID . . .

the founder of Methodism, as he tells of his Emmaus Road experience, which took place in a house on Aldersgate Street in London. The transforming power of the Master's redeeming touch in the life of this one man led to a social and spiritual transformation of an entire nation, and its influence is felt wherever the people called Methodists gather today. Here is the personal testimony of John Wesley, who became a knight of the burning heart, sharing the ministry of the road that leads to victory because the traveler's companion is always the risen Christ:

About a quarter before nine, while (he) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

Such is the testimony of every modern pilgrim who walks the road of life with Christ today!

To His Disciples —

ABOUT THE CONTINUING CALL OF THE RISEN LORD

12

¶ On one occasion, while he was eating a meal with them, he emphasized that they were not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise.

"You have already heard me speak about this," he said, "for John used to baptize with water, but before many days are passed you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This naturally brought them all together, and they asked him,

"Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?"

To this he replied,

"You cannot know times and dates which have been fixed by the Father's sole Authority. But you are to be given power when the Holy Spirit has come to you. You will be witnesses to me, not only in Jerusalem, not only throughout Judaea, not only in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth!"

(Acts 1:4-8)

SUMMONED TO WITNESS

If you have information which should come before a legal body, you may be served with a subpoena. This will require your presence in court to give your testimony concerning what you have heard or

AND JESUS SAID . . .

seen about the evidence being considered. There is no valid excuse for not being present and answering this legal summons. One violates the law if he fails to fulfill the demands of the subpoena.

Jesus issued a spiritual subpoena to his followers in this last recorded conversation he held with his disciples. Here in the final moment of his earthly fellowship with his disciples, he issued them the "Great Commission" and sent them out to bear witness to what they had seen and heard during their days of discipleship to such a Lord. The record of the conversation is found in both Matthew and Acts. In their commentary on Acts Lake and Cadbury say, "This passage is the Lucan form of the Matthaean universal commission, 'Go into all the world and make disciples of all the Gentiles.'"

One can believe there was much more said in these final moments than the simple command of the Christ. One thing is certain; Jesus so indelibly impressed on the minds and hearts of these friends of his the importance of their personal witness to the faith that they went out from Pentecost to become apostles of the Christian faith. These envoys of the risen Christ felt they had been subpoenaed to the witness of the good news and summoned to carry that witness throughout the world.

While in a real sense the delegated authority implied in Jesus' words to the disciples is applicable only to the original band of apostles, the fact of the faith is that every person in every age is summoned by his Lord to witness to his faith. The word comes to us today as to this ancient group: "You shall be my witnesses."

A SUMMONS ISSUED

The words of Jesus, as found in Acts 1:8, suggest the two fold nature of the summons which has been issued to the seeking Christian. First, Jesus promised his followers that they will share in the divine power of God, which is available for human experience. Their question was a natural one for curious Christians: "Has the time come to restore

the Kingdom of Israel?" They wanted to know dates and places when this promised event was to take place. Jesus gave no direct answers other than to suggest that this was knowledge known only to God. But he took the occasion to promise them that when they had qualified through faith and prayer, they could believe with confidence that the power of God's Spirit would come upon them. And in that power they could go out to do the impossible. Because in God's power all things are possible.

I don't know who first coined the phrase, "The possible we do immediately, the impossible takes just a little longer," but I do know that the apostles were among the first doers of what man regarded as the impossible. It is incredible to assume that a group of eleven men could so faithfully and courageously witness to their faith in the risen Christ that they could lead in the transformation of the entire empire! What impossible hope seemed to spring up in the heart of the Master as he looked at those unpromising fellows, who were his only hope of effective witness in the world! Any person of insight and intelligence in that day would have completely ruled out the idea that this band of apostles could march against the empire and in three centuries bring about the recognition of Christianity as the official religion! The fact that this happened is due in large measure to the transmission of spiritual dynamic which takes place in the life of the person who accepts the call of Christ as a spiritual summons to bear witness to what he has seen and heard and experienced in his heart.

Any person who has responsibility for recruiting leadership for the church can testify to the difficulty of persuading people they are capable of doing a particular job. And how often it happens that a person is unconvinced until the recruiter helps him see that there is guidance and help from the church organization, its pastor, and laymen, that there is support and instruction available in how to get the task done, and that when one is conscientiously serving God through the church, there comes an unexpected dynamic, an unearned increment of power

to do the specific task. The person who repeatedly fails in his accepted leadership task in the church generally turns out to be one who has sought to move only in his own human power.

After promising power, Jesus summoned the disciples to use this divine power in their human witness to the faith. God gives the power to Christians to be his messengers, but if we fail to use that power, it may shrivel up and die. During the war when highway traffic was slowed by law to thirty-five miles per hour, I made a cross-country bus trip. One day in talking with the driver about the tremendous power which the bus motor made available and which was not needed to keep the vehicle moving at thirty-five miles on the level, open highway, I learned that the bus company was having difficulty with the motors. The explanation was that the motors were designed to produce speeds of fifty to sixty miles per hour, and they were literally being burned out because they were not being used in near full capacity.

While I cannot vouch for the mechanical authenticity of that diagnosis of bus motors, I can confidently assert that there are persons who fail to live up to life's potential, as far as the power of God in human experience is concerned, and thereby lose their lease on that power. Life says, "Either use this power, or you lose it." And Jesus was saying to the disciples that when the power of the spirit came upon them, they were to use this power to bear witness to the faith which God had given them through Christ.

Jesus was summoning them to stand up and be counted for the cause, whatever the personal cost might be. They went out as "sent persons," emissaries of Christ, envoys of the risen Lord. They were to be preachers of unpopular truth. They were to be witnesses of a crucified Lord. One of the best definitions of what it means to be a witness is that given by Whittaker Chambers in his book *Witness*, where he says,

I will give you an answer: I was a witness. I do not mean a witness for the Government or against Alger Hiss and the others. Nor do I mean the

short, squat, solitary figure, trudging through the impersonal halls of public buildings to testify before Congressional committees, grand juries, loyalty boards, courts of law. A man is not primarily a witness *against* something. That is only incidental to the fact that he is a witness *for* something. A witness, in the sense that I am using the word, is a man whose life and faith are so completely one that when the challenge comes to step out and testify for his faith, he does so, disregarding all rules, accepting all consequences.¹

Well, such a challenge came to those disciples there on the Day of Ascension. They were to make their life and faith so completely one that as their challenge came to stand up and be counted as Christian in their witness, they could do so, "accepting all consequences"!

The main work of Christian discipleship then and now is that of witnessing, not theorizing. The early Christians were not sent out to philosophize about the good life or to discuss academically the latest interpretation and theories. Their witness was simply, "This I know," or "This I have seen," or "This happened to me." Death, torture, imprisonment—let them come, as indeed they did to so many of the early Christians! Ten of the disciples who heard the Master's words of summons were martyred for their witness. They were sent out to show forth the great facts of the Christian faith. And they answered the Christ's subpoena and stood up to bear their fair share of the witness to the Christian faith.

THE WITNESS DEFINED

Today's Christian may well ask questions concerning the nature of what the Christian witness is and what his own personal share of the witness should be. In the language of the New Testament witnesses had authority who had known the historical Jesus, were associated with his ministry, and were eyewitnesses of his passion and resurrection. The reader of Paul's letters finds many references to the basis of his authority as an apostle, since it was common knowledge that he

¹ Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House Inc., 1952).

could qualify under none of these three basic validations of witness. Apparently there were those who were in the habit of taunting Paul with the question concerning how he could consider himself an apostle of Christ.

Paul's authority was that of one who had met Christ on the road of life and found the direction of his life's journey completely reversed. He set the pattern for all Christians who, though they did not know Jesus in the days of his earthly ministry, have come to know him and to accept his mastery of life. We are also called by him to bear witness to what we have heard and seen and experienced of God in Christ.

In describing the Christian witness to which Christ summons us, one can find it to be, first of all, *a simple witness that Jesus lives*. This is the startling fact that welded the faith and fellowship of that group of straggling disciples, who on Pentecost became flaming evangelists of the simple but transforming message that Jesus is alive forevermore.

After Jesus' crucifixion the authorities of Rome went about their business with hardly a ripple in the pattern. The seal of the empire on the tomb of the Nazarene marked the case as officially closed as far as Rome was concerned. Even the Jewish authorities were breathing easier, with one more threat to their position eliminated. They had no way of knowing what Pentecost would produce. And one wonders what they could have done about it if they had known. They were flinging their taunts in the great buzz saw of a dynamic faith, which kept turning with hardly a tremor at the interruption. They were up against the kind of power which could not be conquered. It was the power of God in a dedicated person.

Jesus left his disciples to carry on for themselves. The fact he was no longer physically present gave false hope to the opposition. "He's gone; now this crowd will wither away and die out," they thought. But the technique of Jesus was a sound one in lodging responsibility for the witness with his disciples. God has created persons, not pup-

pets. They must be trained and taught. They must be guided and inspired. But when the chips are down and the witness is called for, it is the disciple who must bear that witness.

I wonder if Jesus felt about his disciples the way a parent feels as he sends his young child off to the first day at school? How much he wants to ease the way for his youngster! The trembling, fearful child, moving out into a world which he has not known before, and of necessity doing it on his own, could use parental support all the way to school and through the first days there. But he would never thus develop the latent power of his own. And his normal growth would be arrested to the extent that the parent smothered it by doing for the child what he must do for himself.

Wasn't that the problem Jesus faced? These were they who must carry on. It all depended on them. Jesus assures them that God would supply the power they need, as it was needed. But they must be the witnesses, theirs must be the testimony. Then he sent them out to shift for themselves, to make mistakes they wouldn't have made if they had been only followers, to take longer in doing the job than their Leader would have taken in the same situation. But they were the ones who did it, in God's power.

The simple faith to which they made witness was that Jesus had lived, that he had died, and that he lives again. This is the simple gospel truth to which all Christians are asked to make affirmation and then to bear witness. Jesus had been *among* them. After this conversation the living presence of Jesus was *within* them.

Moreover, the witness of the Christian can be seen as *a dynamic witness that changed the world*. How can you defeat a person for whom death is the opportunity to enter life that is better than before? The simple faith of the Christian was that on which he based his life, lived his life, gave his life, and lost his life. But he did this in the power that God had given him. And there is no force on earth that can stop the life that is based on a faith so dynamic and so zealous!

AND JESUS SAID . . .

So it is for any person in any age who is willing to take seriously the promise and challenge of Jesus. If you believe God gives power to his children who accept the summons of Jesus to Christian witness, then you will receive that power to answer your summons.

THE CALL CONTINUED

Few would dispute the amazing facts of the historical development of the Christian witness. They would acknowledge that the apostles possessed a special kind of power, which the rest of the world hadn't known. But they would stumble when it comes to putting the focus of this ancient conversational episode in the light of modern living. Yet, if there is one valid fact about Christian faith, it is dependent on our acceptance of Jesus' summons as being a personal call to every person in any age. His Christian challenge comes in each succeeding generation, and only those who seek the authentic experience of God in Christ can actually qualify to witness as did our forebears in the faith.

John Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress* has a word that points up this succession. In the passage "Honest and Valiant-for-Truth Are Summoned," the author has this pilgrim say:

My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought His battles who now will be my Rewarder.

If I am to be true to the Christian pattern of witness, I must obtain my own marks and scars in performing my Christian tasks. Others may contribute the weapons of my warfare, and others will establish the pattern of witness. But I alone can determine when and where I will stand up and be counted for the continuing call of the living Lord.

Here is something more than a call to oneself, if it is to have the authentic quality of a divine summons. One day I was at my church office desk and turned to the telephone to call my home. Without thinking, I dialed the church number from which I was placing the call. Since there are two lines into the church telephone, an automatic device switches the call from line one to line two if line one is busy. So the other line began ringing. I had called myself on the telephone! Apart from a comment you might make about morons and telephones, consider the fact that many persons fail to hear the authentic call of the living Lord because they are so busy calling themselves. Prayer for them becomes autosuggestion at best. Spiritual dynamic depends on human resources alone. The divine element in life so essential to vital faith and effective Christian witness cannot come in when the line of self is busy with self alone. But here in the summons of Jesus to his disciples we have God's call on our lives.

The words of Jesus here have something specific to say to us in our day. Certainly one need go no further to find the authentic record of Christ's call to Christian discipleship. The pattern of witness is the spread of the faith from person to person. One gains the faith and the power to proclaim it in life and deed and word, and then he shares that faith with others and they with still others, and so on. Only thus can the Great Commission be fulfilled. It wasn't enough for eleven disciples to become apostles and envoys. They were to produce witnesses as well as to be witnesses! And such is the call on the Christian today.

The Christian witness began as an exciting, breath-taking, life-giving report about Christ. It was whispered about in the slums of ancient cities. It was carried from city to city across a vast empire. And one day the world awakened to the fact that the Christian witness had succeeded in establishing its way of life throughout the known world. This is the pattern for our witness today. We find it in the early disciples. Their method and technique is still effective.

Here is a call to the witness of the informed memory. The apostles went out, and their witness was simply one of recounting their memory of Jesus. Wherever they were, they remembered Jesus—what he said, how he lived, the love which he had for them and for the world, how he had firmly faced the demands of the cross, how he had triumphed over the tomb. Their witness was simply to tell others what they remembered about the Lord of life as he dwelt among them. Is there a better witness than that prompted by an informed memory that remembers Jesus?

Christ calls us to perpetuate the witness of the divinely warmed heart. The power of the apostles was not some divinely mysterious dynamic which came in a moment and stayed for the rest of life without effort or nurture on their part. They had to constantly refresh their supply of power, right up to the moment of death. This they did by living close to God in the pattern which Jesus had set in his life of prayer and devotion. If prayer is the release of spiritual energy into the life of the Christian, then we can believe the early apostles maintained regular disciplines of the prayerful effort to commune with God. Such power as they found can be found by any person who heeds the Master's summons.

In the seminary I attended, there was a life-sized painting of Christ above the chapel altar. The artist had portrayed the moment when our Lord was commissioning his disciples to go out in his name to bear witness to the Christian faith. The worshiper in the daily chapel service could look above the preacher in the pulpit and see the Christ with arms outstretched, eternally summoning his followers to Christian witness. Below the painting were the words, "As the Father hath sent me into the world, even so send I you."

Such a word comes to the Christian today and reminds him of a divine destiny he shares and of a divine power which can be his to answer the spiritual summons of Jesus to be his witness here and now. And the modern apostle echoes the words of ancient apostles:

We heed, O Lord, Thy summons,
And answer: Here are we!
Send us upon Thine errand,
Let us Thy servants be.
Our strength is dust and ashes,
Our years a passing hour;
But Thou canst use our weakness
To magnify Thy power.²

² John Haynes Holmes, *Methodist Hymnal*, No. 454.